

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Factionalism among U.S. rulers marks debate on attorney general nominee
—PAGE 11

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 69/NO. 3

JAN. 25, 2005

Labor support grows for Utah miners' union fight

UMWA 'Journal' features Co-Op struggle



ML Coalimages

This photo of Co-Op miners, UMWA retirees, and other supporters of union-organizing struggle is featured in January section of UMWA *Journal* 2005 calendar.

BY KATHERINE BENNETT

PRICE, Utah—"Until they decided to rise up against a hostile mine operator, coal miners working at C. W. Mining Co.'s Co-Op Mine near Huntington, Utah, worked often in unsafe conditions and earned just \$5 to \$7 per hour with no health benefits," says a description of the photo featured in the January section of the 2005 calendar published by the United Mine Workers *Journal*.

The *Journal* is the news magazine of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), which sends out the calendar annually to all subscribers and union members. Each

month the calendar features coal miners who are part of struggles in the coalfields and beyond.

Its publication coincides with growing support from the labor movement in the United States for the 16-month-long struggle by the Co-Op miners to win representation by the UMWA. This backing includes financial contributions and letters to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) demanding it rule in favor of demands by the workers to be reinstated at the mine. The bosses fired most of the workers en masse December 9, a week prior to a union representation elec-

Continued on Page 5

U.S. troops focus military assaults in four Iraqi provinces

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The U.S. military has said that four provinces in Iraq, which are largely populated by Sunnis, will be the focus of its operations leading up to elections scheduled for January 30. Thousands of U.S. troops have been sent in to these areas, south and north of Baghdad, as reinforcements. At the same time, Britain's defense secretary said London would send a battalion-strength unit to Iraq to areas where its troops have been stationed.

In a withering campaign to halt the upcoming vote, forces loyal to the former Baathist party regime of Saddam Hussein and their allies continue to carry out deadly attacks on U.S. troops, representatives of Iraq's interim government, Iraqi police and National Guard units, and election officials. Washington, London, and the interim Iraqi administration of Prime Minister Iyad Al-lawli, however, have maintained that elections will take place as scheduled.

U.S. Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz, commander of U.S. ground forces in Baghdad, said that four of Iraq's 18 provinces were not secure enough to hold elections, according to the

Continued on Page 10

Abbas elected Palestinian president

U.S., Israeli gov'ts pleased;
48% of Palestinians vote

BY MICHAEL ITALIE
AND PAUL PEDERSON

Mahmoud Abbas won the January 9 Palestinian presidential election with 62 percent of the vote against his closest rival's 20 percent. A victory for Abbas by a large margin had been virtually assured once his most prominent opponent, Marwan Barghout, dropped out of the race.

Washington and Tel Aviv welcomed the Abbas victory. They approached it as an opportunity to reap benefits from gains the Israeli regime has made the last few years through systematically assassinating hundreds of leaders and cadres of Palestinian armed factions, especially Hamas; building a wall separating Israel from the West Bank; and the social and economic devastation of the occupied territories produced by the Israeli government-imposed restrictions on movement and trade, and state-sponsored theft of Palestinian lands.

Press reports following the election spoke of a "landslide" and "overwhelming" victory, and exaggerated the turnout. Figures provided by the Palestinian Central

Continued on Page 6

Venezuela gov't starts seizing idle farm land

Peasant struggles propel land reform

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS

"El Charcote is only the beginning. There are tens of thousands of hectares of land in Cojedes alone, beyond the holdings of the English company, that big landowners stole from the state or from us. They need to be taken over by the government and given to the peasants who don't have any land." This is what Angel Sarmiento, a peasant who lives in San Carlos, the capital of Cojedes state in northwestern Venezuela, told the *Militant* in a January 11 telephone interview. "What Yañez did, sending the troops to the ranch, is a good thing for us."

Three days earlier, Cojedes governor Johnny Yañez sent about 200 National Guard troops to El Charcote, about five miles south of San Carlos, Sarmiento and other peasants told the *Militant*. The ranch is the property of the Vestey Group, owned by Sam Vestey, a British food magnate. The

troops accompanied government inspectors, who will determine how much, if any, of the 13,000-hectare (32,000-acre) cattle ranch may be held by its owners and how much of it will be turned over to hundreds of peasants who have occupied part of the land for four years and have been using it to grow vegetables and other crops.

The move, and other land seizures by municipal or state authorities, came as the federal government in Caracas, the country's capital, issued a decree January 10 aimed at accelerating land distribution in the country. According to the BBC, more than 10,000 peasants went to Caracas to hear the announcement by President Hugo Chávez. Land occupations, like that at El Charcote, and other struggles by peasants are propelling the land reform forward.

About a week earlier, Eliezer Otaiza,
Continued on Page 8



Reuters/Howard Yanes

Venezuelan girl washes dishes January 8 in front of her family's wooden shack built on land on a cattle ranch owned by Sam Vestey, a British food magnate. That day, the government sent troops to the ranch near San Carlos, Cojedes state, Venezuela, to determine how much of the land the Vestey Group may hold and how much will be turned over to the peasants occupying it.

40 years later: Mississippi Klansman charged for civil rights workers' murder

BY SUSAN LAMONT

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama—On January 7 Edgar Ray Killen, 79, appeared at the Neshoba County Courthouse in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and was charged with three counts of murder in the 1964 slayings of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. A Neshoba County grand jury had returned indictments in the case the previous day. Killen, a Baptist preacher who ran a sawmill, was a well-known leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi. Fellow Klansmen admitted in the past that Killen organized the murders, but he has never been indicted or convicted for this crime. Killen pleaded "not guilty."

"It's 40 years too late," said R.C. Howard of Tchula, Mississippi, in a telephone interview about Killen's indictment. Howard, a farmer who is Black, is a member of the Mileston Cooperative. "Why did they wait? They knew who did these murders all along. It doesn't matter that he's old. They let him live his life. He's old now, but he wasn't old when he did those murders and killed those young people. He took their lives. They talk about the 'wheels of justice'—well, the wheels have turned for him now. And

they need to dig up the other ones who did it and bury them in the prison!"

Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner—in their early 20s when they were brutally murdered—were in Neshoba County in the summer of 1964 to help register Blacks

Continued on Page 7

Also Inside:

- | | |
|---|---|
| U.S. housing costs up, as real wages decline | 2 |
| Algerian gov't deals blows to armed 'Islamist' groups | 3 |
| Colonial legacy, capitalism plague post-tsunami relief in Sri Lanka | 4 |
| Lessons of strike in Toronto against Quality Meat Packers | 5 |
| Cuba's internationalism in Africa discussed at L.A. school | 9 |

U.S. housing costs up, while real wages decline

BY PAUL PEDERSON

More and more working people in the United States are unable to meet basic living costs, according to two recently published studies. The reports highlight the increasing grind on working people as rent, medical insurance, food, and child-care costs increase, while real wages—that is, the purchasing power of workers’ pay—have declined.

Washington’s Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sets “affordable” rent at equal to or less than 30 percent of a renter’s income. According to a study published in December, a worker today would need to earn \$15.37 an hour in order to afford the average two-bedroom apartment in the United States.

The report, published by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, says that in only four out of the 3,066 U.S. counties can a worker making minimum wage afford a one-bedroom apartment by the federal government’s standards. In the 991 counties where 80 percent of the nation’s 36 million renter households are concentrated, a worker making the state’s minimum wage would need to work an average of 80 hours a week in order to afford the rent on the average two-bedroom apartment.

“It’s very clear that over the last decade rents have been going up all the time—sometimes quicker, sometimes not so quick—but at the same time wages for the lowest wage-earners have basically stagnated, except for a brief period in the late 1990s,” Danilo Pelletiere, an author of the report, told the *Militant* in a telephone interview.

In 2004, nominal hourly wages increased by 2.6 percent, while the Consumer Price Index included a 2.9 percent nationwide rise in rents. That doesn’t tell the whole story, however. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, real average weekly earnings—after adjustments for inflation—actually fell by 0.6 percent overall in the first 11 months of 2004. Last November, these earnings remained close to where they stood at the end of the last recession in November 2001.

The minimum wage, for its part, has continued to lose value. Today’s \$5.15 hourly federal minimum wage is worth

\$2 less than it did in 1968.

In the state of New York, 57 percent of the average median income is needed to afford rent on a one-bedroom apartment. It goes up to nearly 65 percent for two-bedroom apartments. For affordable rent on a two-bedroom apartment, a worker in New York would need to earn \$18.18 an hour. At minimum wage, you would need to put in 121 hours a week to pay the landlord for the average two-bedroom apartment.

An article in the December 30 *New York Times* reported on a study that is set to be published in January by the Women’s Center for Education and Career Advancement. The study shows that nearly half the households in the city do not earn enough to pay their basic living costs. The report estimates that income needed to afford this minimum standard in the city is more than three times the national poverty level.

In particular, the report shows the extent to which the economic grind is falling disproportionately on working-class women. An average single mother with two young kids in New York City, for example, will



Militant/Sam Manuel

Boarded up section of the Carrollsburg public housing complex in Washington, D.C., July 2004. No new residents are being placed in the complex and the city has plans to “redevelop” it, including creating single family homes to be sold at “market rates,” driving up mortgage payments and rents.

pay more in a year for child care than rent, the study shows. The next largest expense after rent and child care is taxes, consuming 15 percent of income.

“The report’s minimum recommended

income level has risen substantially throughout the city since the last time it was issued, in 2000,” the *Times* reported, “primarily because of soaring housing costs.”

Ford halts training program after charges of racism

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Ford Motor Company has agreed to settle out of court a class action suit charging that the company’s selection process for an apprenticeship program discriminated against Blacks, the Associated Press reported January 4. Current and former employees at Ford filed their complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1998. The settlement is awaiting final approval by federal judges.

The agreement covers approximately 3,400 Black employees who took a test on or after Jan. 1, 1997, to enter Ford’s apprenticeship program but were not chosen to participate. Under this plan, employees were trained for higher-paid jobs, such as electricians and millwrights. In their lawsuit, Black workers charged that Ford selected them for the program at a substantially lower rate than it did for other employees.

Under the terms of the settlement, Ford will set aside 279 positions in its training program for Black employees who had taken

the test for the apprenticeship but were not admitted. The company will also pay each of those employees \$2,400. The 11 former and current employees at Ford plants in Sharonville and Batavia, Ohio, who originally filed the complaint against the company, will be paid \$30,000 each. The higher amount is intended to compensate them for their assistance in the case and in exchange for release of their court claims, according to press reports.

Ford is also obligated to pay attorneys who represented the workers and cover all court costs, estimated at \$1.1 million. A year after the settlement’s approval, the company

will pay the attorneys \$567,000 for implementing and monitoring the agreement.

Ford has denied any wrongdoing but ended the program anyway. “Based on some of the issues that had been raised, we stopped the training program in August,” said company spokesman Glenn Ray. The company also agreed to set up a new apprenticeship program “to be monitored by an industrial psychologist with expertise in workplace and personnel issues,” AP reported.

The United Auto Workers, which represents workers at Ford and participated in the apprenticeship committee, was also a defendant in the suit.

CORRECTIONS

In the January 18 issue, two figures for Indonesia’s foreign debt were cited in two different articles. In “Social catastrophe unfolds in South Asia after tsunami” the figure used of nearly \$81 billion was cited by Reuters and other news agencies, based on reports from the Paris Club. In the article “Indonesia: imperialism amplified toll of tsunami” the figure of \$136 billion is based on the CIA’s World Factbook 2004 estimate and is close to the figure cited by the World Bank, which is based on sources from Indonesia’s central bank. The World Bank figure, \$133 billion as of the fall of 2003, is more widely accepted and should have been cited in both articles.

Also in the same issue, an error was introduced in the editing in the article “Four million Cubans join defense exercise.” Cuba’s population was incorrectly reported as 4 million. It is in fact 11.3 million.

An erroneous statement appeared in “Brazil: unionists march for minimum wage hike,” in the January 11 issue. The article mistakenly stated that the European Union’s Growth and Stability Pact calls for member states to keep government debt below 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). The correct figure is 60 percent. The annual budget deficit of EU member states is supposed to stay below 3 percent of their GDP.

THE MILITANT

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The ‘Militant’ gives you regular coverage of the struggles by peasants in Venezuela for land, as well as similar fights by urban workers, fishermen, and other exploited producers. It covers the efforts by Cuban internationalist volunteers in that country and opposition to imperialist intervention.

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Unemployed workers in Anaco, Anzoátegui state, Venezuela, train to run tractor as part of forming farm co-op, March 2004.

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The Militant

Vol. 69/No. 3

Closing news date: January 12, 2005

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Published weekly except for one week in January, June, July, and September.
The Militant (ISSN 0026-3885), 306 W. 37th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10018. Telephone: (212) 244-4899; Fax (212) 244-4947.
E-mail: TheMilitant@verizon.net
The Militant **website** is: www.themilitant.com

Correspondence concerning subscriptions or changes of address should be addressed to The Militant Business Office, 306 W. 37th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10018.

Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Militant, 306 W. 37th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10018.

Subscriptions: **United States:** for one-year subscription send \$35 to above address.

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Unemployment cuts take effect in Germany

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

The German government's latest cut-backs on benefits for the unemployed went into effect January 1, as the number of workers without a job reached levels not seen since the reunification of the country in 1990. German chancellor Gerhard Schröder's Hartz IV plan—named after Peter Hartz, the Volkswagen executive who designed it—will reduce monthly benefits, and force the long-term jobless to take workfare-type jobs paying one euro (\$1.32) per hour or face loss of benefits altogether.

Several hundred protested the implementation of Hartz IV in Berlin. Smaller numbers of protesters turned out in other cities across the country. The government deployed police dogs and riot cops in anticipation of large demonstrations like those held last summer, when tens of thousands turned out against the new government measures every Monday. Those actions were organized largely by trade unions and the Party of Democratic Socialism, the former Communist Party that ruled in east Germany. Government officials and bourgeois commentators breathed a sigh of relief that the size of the protests fell so far short of the earlier actions.

Unemployment initially declined after Schröder campaigned for office in 1998 on the promise of bringing the number of jobless below 4 million, but has risen steadily in the last three years. Unemployment in December reached almost 4.5 million, or 10.8 percent of the workforce. "Be prepared for a nasty figure in January 2005," warned HVB Group economist Andreas Rees, "about 5 million unemployed on a non-seasonally adjusted basis."

In the eastern part of the country about 20 percent of the workforce is out of work.

The social-democratic government's solution to persistently high unemployment is "support and pressure" for those receiving benefits. While Berlin makes vague promises of "support" in finding new jobs for those without, it has spelled out much more clearly what it means by "pressure" on the unemployed to find work: reduced benefits.

Unemployment compensation in Germany is among the highest in Europe, currently paying 60 percent of previous earnings for the first 32 months out of work, and about 55 percent thereafter. Hartz IV reduces the duration of payments to a single 12-month period and



Reuters/Christian Charisius

A woman holds sign deriding "one-euro" jobs during a January 3 protest at an unemployment office in Hamburg, Germany. The German government's cuts in jobless benefits include a workfare-type measure requiring unemployed workers to accept work for 1 euro (\$1.32) per hour in order to receive welfare payments.

eliminates benefits after that, replacing them with welfare payments, which currently amount to 345 euros per month in the west, and 331 euros plus rent and heating subsidies in the east. Welfare is available only for those who can prove they are looking for a job.

Workers seeking benefits or trying to defend their right to continue receiving them will have to endure a complex application process. "It kicks off with six pages of boxes and tiny black type designed to ferret out an unemployed person's basic personal data, down to his or her bank account number," the *International Herald Tribune* reported December 29. "An additional 14 pages of forms aim to root out more sensitive matters, like what sorts of savings, investments or real estate a person might have, and how much his or her spouse or live-in partner might have."

The *Tribune* cited the concrete effect Hartz IV is having on one couple in Frankfurt, whose income will be more than halved from 2,350 euros to 1,050. Hans Schmidt, newly unemployed, will get 60 percent of his previous monthly wage of 1,750 euros. At the same time, his wife Sabine, who has been out of work for a year, is losing the 600 euros she had been receiving per month because, according to the new law, her husband's unemployment benefits are enough to cover both. The sum Hans receives will be reduced as well if he does not find a job this year.

"If they do not find work," wrote the *Tribune*, "the long-term unemployed will be required to take what have been dubbed 'one-euro' jobs, after the amount they pay per hour." These will be make-work jobs, such as trash collection in parks and churches, created by local governments.

Capitalist enterprises also have an eye on these "one-euro" jobs as a means to make superprofits. In the state of Saxony-Anholt, reports the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, landscaping bosses have gained the approval of government officials to hire the unemployed at one euro per hour. Those who refuse this work will lose all benefits.

Offshore oil deposits found in Cuban waters

BY ARRIN HAWKINS

The Cuban government recently announced that new oil deposits were discovered off Santa Cruz, on the northern coast of Havana province. These reserves are reportedly of a better quality than the heavy, sulfur-laden crude currently used to generate 80 percent of Cuba's electrical power. In a December 24 address to Cuba's National Assembly, President Fidel Castro said the discovery was "good news" for the Cuban economy and projected the oil field will begin production in 2006.

According to Trading Charts, a financial online news service, the Santa Cruz oil site produced 1,000 tons of crude December 14–19 and promises to yield around 14 mil-

lion tons of light, good-quality petroleum. Cuban state-owned Cubapetroleo, working with Canadian companies Sherritt and Pebercan, will drill two new test wells and continue exploration of three other potential deposits this year.

In 1999, Cuba opened up a 112,000-square-kilometer area of its waters in the Gulf of Mexico to foreign exploration, in hopes of tapping into similar oil reserves as those found off the gulf near the shores of Mexico and the United States. Brazil's Petroleo Brasileiro SA, Canada's Sherritt of Toronto and Pebercan of Montreal, and Spain's Repsol YPF SA have since begun joint ventures with the Cuban state to contract blocks of this area for deep-water ex-

ploration. Joint ventures between the Cuban government and foreign companies—particularly Canadian firms—account for 60 percent of Cuba's oil and gas output.

In the early 1990s Cuba's trade on preferential terms with the former Soviet-bloc countries, which accounted for 85 percent of the island nation's trade, was disrupted. Cuba's economy went into a severe downturn commonly referred to in Cuba as the "special period." Due to the rise of oil prices and lack of hard currency because of Washington's economic war, Cuba has strived since that time to meet much of its domestic needs for petroleum through internal production.

According to the Washington-based Energy Information Administration, Cuba has more than tripled its oil production since 1991. Its natural gas production has also increased significantly. A July 29 *Chicago Tribune* article reported that Cuba currently produces about "75,000 barrels of oil a day, half of its current fuel consumption."

Because of the poor quality of this domestic crude oil, however, Cuba has needed to modify its power stations to cope with the high sulfur content. Recent electricity blackouts in Cuba have been caused by the antiquated transmission lines and costly maintenance of these power plants, rather than by fuel shortages.

Cuba imports most of its higher-grade oil from Venezuela. The Caracas Accords signed in 2000 give 11 Caribbean nations preferential rates on oil imports. Under the Caracas deal, 80 percent of Venezuela's oil shipments to Cuba are to be paid at world market prices within 90 days of delivery. The remaining 20 percent is sold by Venezuela on preferential terms: payable within 15 years, with a two-year grace period and interest rate of 2 percent.

In exchange, Cuba has offered free health care at its medical facilities for thousands of patients from Venezuela. Thousands of Cuban doctors are also currently serving on a volunteer basis in working-class neighborhoods across Venezuela. The Caracas Accords are scheduled to expire in 2005, but other trade agreements between the two nations are in the works.

The Canadian companies Sherritt and Pebercan are also planning to invest \$1 billion in Cuba to increase nickel and cobalt production from 50,000 to 85,000 tons. The government of China has also reportedly agreed to loan up to \$2 billion to Cuba for joint nickel and nickel-iron mining ventures. During a November visit to Havana by Chinese president Hu Jintao, Castro said China's investments would help Cuba double its nickel output. Driven by its recent economic expansion, there is increased demand in China for this metal. Cuba, which has the world's third-largest nickel reserves, currently accounts for half of China's nickel imports.

Algiers deals blows to 'Islamist' groups

BY ARRIN HAWKINS

Two leaders of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), an organization that came out of the Islamic Salvation Front, were hunted down by Algerian security forces at the end of last year, according to Reuters. Algerian government officials announced January 3 that the arrest of Nourredine Boudiafi in November and the killing of his deputy, Younes Chaabane, on December 1 have led to the "almost total collapse" of the organization. In the same announcement, Algerian authorities claimed that Rachid Abu Tourab, the head of the GIA, had been killed by close aides in July.

Since the beginning of the 1992 civil war in Algeria, the GIA has claimed responsibility for numerous kidnappings and assassinations as well as the hijacking of an Air France passenger flight in 1994. At its height, the GIA reportedly had thousands of members. A Beirut newspaper, the *Daily Star*, reported in a January 5 article that "action by the security forces had reduced the GIA to no more than about 30 terrorists... split into two groups."

The latest developments came six months after the killing of Nabil Sahraoui, a leader of the larger and more active Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), another "Islamist" group that Algiers claims has ties to al-Qaeda.

The GIA came out of the dissolution of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), after a military junta nullified the party's announced victory in the 1991 parliamentary elections and banned the FIS. Paris had urged such a measure by the Algerian government, citing the danger of "Islamic fundamentalism" to Algeria's secular state. A 12-year-long civil war ensued, during which 150,000 people were killed, largely by right-wing attacks and government repression. According to Reuters, authorities in Algiers now claim responsibility for the deaths of 5,200 civilians during the war. These individuals were "taken in for inter-

rogation by security forces in the 1990s and never seen again," Reuters said.

The FIS was a bourgeois nationalist group, which gained support as a result of the overthrow of the workers and farmers government that came to power in Algeria in 1963 after the victory of the anti-colonial struggle against France. That movement was led by the National Liberation Front (FLN), a faction of which overthrew the revolutionary government of President Ahmed Ben Bella in 1965. Subsequent FLN governments used repression against opponents and implemented capitalist economic austerity measures, which eventually fueled support for "Islamist" groups. In 1989, the FIS became a legal party and the main opposition to the ruling FLN. At the time of the 1991 elections, the FIS promised to be less subservient to French imperialism than the FLN. At the same time, the group advocated "free market" economic policies to further open Algeria to finance capital. As with other "Islamist" groups, it veiled itself in militant rhetoric and a religious veneer with the stated aim of creating an Islamic republic.

The decline of the GIA and GSPC is part of a broader weakening of Islamism as a current in Algerian politics. In a 2000 amnesty under the government of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, two other such groups, the Islamic Salvation Army and the Islamic League for the Call and Combat, disbanded.

Over the last decade, Washington has made inroads in Algeria at the expense of Paris, the country's former colonial master. Washington stepped up military aid to Algiers last March and collaboration with Algerian military forces under the banner of hunting militants linked to al-Qaeda along the country's southern border with Mali. The *Boston Globe* reported last year that "this joint effort marks another front in the war on terrorism and a watershed in U.S.-Algerian relations."

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Thousands of tsunami victims still not reached as death toll increases

BY PAUL PEDERSON

In the two weeks following the earthquake and tsunami that struck Indian Ocean-rim nations December 26, more has emerged about the social conditions that magnified the number of deaths and destruction. More than 157,000 are now confirmed to have been killed—including over 105,000 in Indonesia, 30,000 in Sri Lanka, and 15,000 in India. In the United States, United Kingdom, and elsewhere, contributions, often in the form of small donations from workers and others, have topped or come close to topping the promises of government aid.

The scale of contributions, however, has not translated into a massive, well-coordinated aid effort. The first international assistance did not arrive in Meulaboh, one of the hardest-hit cities in Indonesia, until January 2—a full week after the disaster struck. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that as of January 7 areas of the devastated western Sumatran coast, where an estimated 1,550 villages have been destroyed, had not received any relief. There have been widespread press reports of deaths due to infections from minor wounds left untreated.

“To some extent a process of natural selection has occurred,” Paul Shumack, an Australian doctor, told the *New York Times* January 5. “People with no treatment at all are already dead.”

Shumack is treating patients at one of the hospitals that has been set up in Banda Aceh, the capital of the devastated Aceh province. The article described Shumack amputating the leg of a woman whose relatively minor wound had developed into a serious infection. The amputation was performed with what was described as a handsaw and without any blood for transfusions. The patient died after the operation.

“The 150,000 dead figure is a very low figure. It will be much bigger,” said Jan Egeland, a top UN official. The WHO has warned that the 150,000 toll could double as survivors contract diseases caused by poor sanitation. While the UN is nominally in charge of relief efforts, dozens of different organizations are running their own operations on the ground, creating a sprawling, decentralized jumble of agencies and jurisdictions.

Government aid and private charity

Pledges of aid from governments have now topped \$4 billion. Washington and other imperialist governments that have promised much of the assistance have a record of not fulfilling such pledges, at least not in their entirety. The aid that is arriving often has strings attached. The largest “donor,” the government of Australia, is actually offering half of its \$810 million pledge in the form of low-interest loans. Other governments are contemplating requirements that the funds they offer be spent only on goods manufactured in their country.

“The word pledge doesn’t always mean commitment,” David Roodman, a researcher at the Washington-based Center for Global Development, told the *Los Angeles Times*. “A country is considered lucky if they get half of what is pledged at these donor conferences.”

Iranian president Mohammad Khatami said in December that of the \$1.1 billion pledged after the Bam earthquake in his country in 2003, only \$17 million had arrived. Of the \$9 billion that was pledged at a 1999 donor conference for relief to Central American nations devastated in 1998 by Hurricane Mitch, less than a third ever materialized, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

In the United States, both the Democratic and Republican parties have placed particular emphasis on private donations instead of a massive, government-organized relief effort. By January 8, more than \$342 million has been given to private aid agencies and charities, a number that is on its way to dwarfing the \$350 million pledged by the federal government in Washington.

These private charities are often little more than businesses in their own right, complete with highly paid chief executive officers (CEOs) and scores of well-remunerated officials who grow fat off the generosity

of those making contributions.

The American Red Cross, for example, which has raised nearly \$150 million in the wake of the tsunami, pays current CEO Marsha Evans a base salary of \$450,000. Her predecessor, Harold Decker, raked in \$1.3 million for serving a nine-month stint in that post from October 2001 to June 2002. Decker’s predecessor, Bernadine Healy, received a golden parachute of more than \$1.5 million plus \$352,283 for the last six months of 2001.

This record is not unique to the Red Cross. The CEOs of most major charities rarely make less than \$200,000 a year, and many clear twice that sum or more.

‘Untouchables’ denied relief

What relief does make it to affected countries is then distributed by the local capitalist regimes according to its social priorities. According to a January 7 report from Agence France Presse (AFP), India’s lower-caste victims of the tsunami disaster have been forced from relief camps by higher caste survivors and are being denied aid supplies. Members of the lower cast are often referred to as “untouchables.”

“The higher caste fishing community did not allow us to sleep in a marriage hall where they are put up because we belong to the lowest caste,” said Kuppuswamy Ramachandran, 32, a farm worker from the Nagapattinam district, which bore the brunt of the maelstrom. “After three days we were moved out to a school but now the school is going to reopen within three days and the teachers drove us out.” Ramachandran reported that the school had no lights, toilets, or drinking water.

“No government official or aid has flowed into the village which houses 83 Dalit [untouchable] families,” said the AFP report.

“At the relief camps we are treated differently due to our social status. We are not given relief supplies,” said Chandra Jayaram, 35, who lost her husband to the tsunami and is yet to receive the government-promised compensation of 100,000 rupees (\$2,174). “The fishing community told us not to stay with them. The government says we will not be given anything as we are not affected much.”

‘Freezing’ the debt

The United Kingdom’s finance minister, Gordon Brown, announced January 7 that the G7—a grouping of creditor nations made up of Paris, Washington, London, Rome, Berlin, Ottawa, and Tokyo—would



Reuters/LTTE handout

A member of the Tamil Tiger rebels takes down information January 1 on people displaced by the tsunami in a refugee camp in Mullattivu in eastern Sri Lanka.

place a temporary moratorium, perhaps for one year, on debt payments for the countries most affected by the tsunami. Brown did not say that the debt wouldn’t continue to accrue interest during this period, only that scheduled payments would be postponed. He made it clear that under the proposal no portion of the debt would be cancelled.

Indonesia, the hardest-hit nation, is also the biggest debt-slave in the region. Its more than \$130 billion debt accounts for 80 percent of the country’s gross domestic product. Sri Lanka’s \$9.6 billion debt equals 59 percent of its GDP. In all, the World Development Movement, a UK-based organization that campaigns for debt relief and cancellation, reports that the five countries worst-hit by the disaster—Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, and the Maldives—pay \$45.2 billion a year to wealthy families in the citadels of finance capital on the principal and interest of a debt that among them totals nearly \$300 billion.

More on early-warning system

The undersea 9.0 magnitude earthquake that caused the tsunami erupted less than 100 miles off the coast of Sumatra. Fifteen minutes later, the Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued a bulletin on the quake to the 26 Pacific-rim nations giving it a preliminary estimate of 8.0 on the Richter scale. “We know a tsunami will occur if the [earthquake] magnitude is over 6.3, and that a tsunami will cause damage if it’s over 7.0,” said Yoshinobu Tsuji of the University of Tokyo’s Earthquake Research Institute, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported.

Knowing that there was a virtual certainty that the temblor would set the killer waves in motion, the bulletin from the center was relayed by the U.S. Pacific Command to its

base in the Indian Ocean at Diego Garcia.

Some 4,000 U.S. troops and support personnel are stationed at the base, which sits just south of the Maldives and directly in the path of the tsunami. The U.S. Navy said that “favorable ocean topography minimized the tsunami’s impact on the atoll.” But the base received a warning that was quickly broadcast to all who would be potentially affected. This fact no doubt contributed to the absence of fatalities. No one was even injured at Diego Garcia, while dozens died in the nearby Maldives islands.

Although the first tsunami wave took less than an hour to reach Indonesia, it took more than two hours to reach Sri Lanka and Thailand, and at least three hours to reach southern India. Yet in that entire time, no warning was conveyed to those countries.

U.S. senator Joseph Lieberman is calling for buoys to be installed throughout the world that would extend the system currently in place in the Pacific to other bodies of water. The cost of the proposed network is \$30 million. The Associated Press reports that Lieberman’s proposal, however, doesn’t account for “a more costly factor—communications links to warn people in coastal areas before the giant waves arrive.”

That would require long-term development of infrastructure in the semicolonial nations in the region, from electrification to roads, to modern communications networks—not to mention well-constructed housing—which the majority of working people in the region do not have access to. Instead, the workings of capitalism ensure that the plunder of resources and superexploitation of labor by imperialist states and the local capitalist regimes will go on, blocking any meaningful social development and leaving millions at the mercy of nature when disasters like the recent tsunami strike.

Colonial legacy, capitalist reality plague Sri Lanka

BY CINDY JAQUITH

A legacy of colonialism followed by imperialist domination and rule by local capitalist regimes has magnified the devastation of the tsunami on the coastal areas of the island nation of Sri Lanka, just southeast of India. About 30,000 were confirmed dead as of early January and more than 860,000 had been displaced. Coastal fishing communities were the worst hit, including many areas inhabited by the Tamils, a people who suffer national oppression by the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan government.

More than 75 percent of the Sri Lankan population of 21 million lives in the countryside. The majority of these rural toilers are subsistence farmers or farm workers. Tea, rubber, and coconuts are the country’s main exports, while apparel and textiles are a growing industry.

One-third of the country’s exports go to the United States, and 12.5 percent to Britain. Sri Lanka is heavily in debt to imperialist banks and lending institutions, owing \$9.6 billion, according to the latest World Bank figures.

According to UNICEF, the country’s per capita income is \$930 annually. Twenty-two percent of infants are born with low birth weight and 14 percent of children under 5 have stunted growth. Twenty-eight percent of the rural population lacks a reliable, clean source of drinking water. There

is one telephone for every 10 people, and one doctor for every 2,500 people.

Sri Lanka, previously known as Ceylon, was colonized by Portugal in the 1500s and then by the Dutch in 1658. Britain wrested control of the island from the Netherlands in 1798 and in 1815 established Ceylon as a crown colony. The British rulers set up huge tea and rubber plantations and crushed rebellions against their rule in 1817, 1843, and 1848.

The British used divide-and-rule tactics to maintain their control. They introduced large numbers of Tamils into the colonial administration, although Tamils constitute only about 12 percent of the population, the majority being Sinhalese. Tamils from southern India were at the same time brought in to work as virtual slaves on tea plantations.

In 1948 Ceylon became an independent member of the British Commonwealth. In 1972 its name was changed to Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan government sought to keep Tamil and Sinhalese working people divided. Repression against the Tamil minority sharpened in 1960, when a law was adopted making Sinhalese the only official language. In response to mass protests by Tamils, the government declared a state of emergency, outlawed the Tamil Federal Party, and made it illegal to strike.

In 1983, war broke out between the government and the Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed group calling for an independent state for Tamils in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government called in Indian troops in 1987 to enforce a peace settlement. Since then, attacks on the Tamil minority have persisted, with tens of thousands slain by government-backed death squads.

A truce in the war was only established in 2002. About 64,000 people have died in the conflict. An estimated 105,000 Tamils were forced into exile in India. More than 200,000 Tamils have fled to the United States, Canada, and other countries.

Coverage of the tsunami in the Tamil media has included reports of the Sri Lankan Army assaulting Tamil refugees and delaying aid shipments. The website Tamilnet reported that 200 thugs organized by the Sri Lankan Army attacked 67 Tamil families who had taken refuge in a school. They reportedly beat the male refugees and set fire to the families’ possessions. The refugees were then forced to move to a new shelter.

The LTTE website reports that the Liberation Tigers have organized almost all emergency aid and evacuation in the Tamil regions.

Meanwhile, 1,000 troops from India, as well as U.S. Marines and the British frigate HMS *Chatham* have arrived as part of the relief efforts.

Lessons of Quality Meat Packers strike in Toronto

To strengthen the unions a fighting strategy is needed against employers

BY JOHN STEELE

TORONTO—Six weeks have passed since the end of the four-week strike by meat packers against Quality Meat Packers (QMP) that started here November 1. The 570 members of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 175 have drawn different conclusions on the question of why—despite a strong initial strike vote against the company’s first offer—we were not strong enough to win what we need and deserve.

UNION TALK

Some think we need a different union. Others say the problem lies with the workers who voted to end the strike. Others believe the strike helped us get into a better position to fight when the new contract expires in three years.

The bosses didn’t expect a strike nor did they want one. They thought we would accept their first offer. They were even more surprised when their “final offer” was rejected, albeit by a small majority, midway through the strike.

In the previous two weeks they had sent letters to the strikers claiming they had no more money to improve the offer, implying the plant would close if the walkout continued.

They said they wouldn’t be competitive if they gave any more and could go out of business.

A number of strikers reported receiving intimidating and threatening phone calls suggesting they vote the “right way” on the company’s second offer. Foremen and supervisors phoned a selected list of strikers to encourage them to participate in the third and final vote.

The owners took machinery out of the plant to make it look like they had made the decision to close it down. They never had any intention of carrying out this threat, regardless of the outcome of the November 28 vote on the company’s third offer, according to QMP representative Karen Sample, as reported in the Nov. 27, 2004, *Toronto Globe and Mail*.

Our fight was a good example of what communists call the “sea change in working-class politics,” a change that began in the late 1990s.

QMP workers suffered an important defeat six years ago, when the bosses drove back wages and benefits by 40 percent.

This did not occur at QMP alone. Bosses in the meatpacking industry throughout Canada and the United States had forced similar concessions. On top of that, workers at Maple Leaf Pork (MLP), the biggest hog slaughterhouse in Ontario, had several months earlier accepted a similar contract without a fight. Neither the 1999 defeat nor the MLP vote, however, weighed on us when we decided to vote against the first company offer and go on strike.

Bosses’ strategy was to divide strikers

Soon after the rejection of their “final offer”—the second vote, where 52 percent of workers voted to remain on strike—the bosses took advantage of the differences among the membership over whether to continue the walkout. They encouraged some to circulate a petition addressed to the UFCW demanding the union settle and end the strike

Then, to deepen the divisions the company employed red-baiting—a tactic well-used by the employing class in many strikes and labor battles in the past and which will be used again in the future. The bosses organized to have strikers circulate articles from the *Militant*, written by myself and another striker, reporting on the walkout at QMP and other labor battles. The red-baiting campaign, which included the circulation of a leaflet titled “Who Wants to Fool Us and What are Their Intentions?”, centered on the charge that “communists” wanted to shut the plant down and were responsible for the strike.

A significant number of workers accepted these lies as the truth, but most rejected them and were insulted by this campaign. “Two people can’t brainwash hundreds of people,” a number of workers said. “The company caused the strike because of the pay and working conditions.”

Even though they were a minority, the workers supporting the red-baiting attack by the company were very vocal and had the backing of the bosses behind the scenes. A few even attempted a physical confrontation on the picket line. This would have served the company’s interests because the security guards and cops would have been brought in to victimize strikers. This didn’t happen because of the firmness and discipline of many of the strikers in face of the company’s campaign of intimidation.

The company’s strategy was to create and deepen divisions in the union membership. The QMP bosses were determined to beat back the unexpected challenge they faced. They were hurting because the strike



Militant

Trucks coming into Quality Meat Packers plant in Toronto November 16 to pick up production line during month-long strike by 570 UFCW Local 175 members. Company adopted this ploy to give impression it would shut down if walkout continued.

had economic weight. It took place in the busy pre-Christmas weeks. In addition, the 28,000 hogs a week usually slaughtered by QMP were beyond the capacity at the other two major hog slaughterhouses in the province. The live hogs had to be shipped to the United States and other provinces in Canada at great expense to hog farmers.

‘Business unionism’ failed the test

In contrast to the company, our union didn’t have a fighting strategy. The strike was governed by the routine methods of “business unionism.” We received weekly strike pay for picketing a minimum of 20 hours every week over five days and were told to leave the rest to the negotiating committee, provincial union staff, and the government mediator. Union power potentially unleashed on November 1 remained hamstrung during the entire four weeks of the strike.

For example, at no time in preparation for the strike, or during the walkout, did we discuss or vote on a clear set of demands that we could rally around. This prompted comments on the picket line like, “I would stay out longer if I knew what I was fighting for.” Almost all major aspects of the negotiations remained secret.

The strike remained isolated and almost invisible, including to other UFCW members. No effort was made to draw other members of the union into active support

for the strike, in particular the more than 1,000 members at the UFCW-organized MLP slaughterhouse a half-hour drive away, which was receiving hogs destined for QMP. There were other workers on strike in the Toronto area and beyond at the same time. Solidarity could have been built among these fellow fighters. This was not organized. An opportunity was not seriously taken advantage of to bring the strike to a November 27 province-wide rally in Toronto of 5,000 workers organized by the Ontario Federation of Labor.

The economic impact of the strike on the province-wide hog industry opened the door to reaching out to hog farmers for solidarity. Packing companies like QMP and MLP also exploit many of these farmers because the prices they pay for their hogs don’t adequately cover the farmers’ production costs. No initiatives were taken in this direction.

None of the “update” leaflets distributed by the UFCW officials during the strike countered the company campaign of intimidation and misinformation. Worse, material printed on our union letterhead repeated the bosses’ claim that the company had no more money, as well as the inference that the owners might close the plant if the strike continued. These “updates” acted as a transmission belt for pressure from the company on the strikers.

A fighting strategy relying on the use of union power and the economic weight of the strike to cut off the bosses’ profits, while reaching out for solidarity from other workers, is what we needed to win a better contract and strengthen the union.

Rely on strength of class, solidarity

In today’s world, with a worldwide depression of the capitalist profit system underway, the employers’ brutal productivity drive to boost their sagging profit rates will continue, competition among capitalists will intensify further, and workers and our unions will be targeted. Under these conditions, routine business union methods are more and more ineffective. Relying on the organized strength of our class and on solidarity—all for one and one for all—is the only way we can defend ourselves against the bosses and strengthen our unions, or organize them if we don’t have a union.

A good example of this course is the 16-month-long struggle of U.S. coal miners at the Co-Op mine in Huntington, Utah, who are fighting to become members of the United Mine Workers of America in order to win a living wage and safety on the job.

There are lessons in the fighting strategy of these coal miners, who have won support from other unionists across the United States and internationally, that need to be discussed by the workers at QMP and other meatpacking plants who have gone through struggles like our recent strike. We should extend our solidarity to them by supporting their demand that the U.S. National Labor Relations Board recognize the UMWA as their union.

John Steele is a member of UFCW Local 175 and was one of the workers on strike against Quality Meat Packers.

Co-Op miners featured in UMWA calendar

Continued from front page

tion. Recent support for the Co-Op miners has come from UMWA locals and district bodies, locals of the United Transportation Union, and others.

“Their situation reminded many of the old days of coal mining when workers had no rights, no security and no dignity. The straw that broke the camel’s back came in September 2003 when the operator decided to unjustly discipline a popular rank-and-file leader,” says the UMWA *Journal* calendar.

“Some 70 miners walked out of the mine and refused to work. The operator responded by locking them out, launching a 10-month strike that labor hailed as a ‘pivotal battle for the rights of workers.’ The striking miners asked the UMWA for help, and the union responded by filing unfair labor practice charges. The NLRB ruled for the miners, and in July 2004 they returned to work with a right to back pay. The miners also asked the UMWA to file a representation petition, which we did. In 2005 the UMWA will fight with the Co-Op miners to help them finally gain true union representation.”

The last statement is important, Co-Op miners say, because it points out that the miners have yet to win union representation and still need solidarity.

One month ago, on December 17, a union election was held at the Co-Op mine, located in Huntington, in the middle of an important western coal mining region. Of the 10 working underground coal mines in this area, only two are organized by the UMWA. Co-Op miners had three choices on the union representation ballot: UMWA, no union, or

International Association of United Workers Union (IAUWU). Workers say the IAUWU is an outfit organized and run by the bosses. The NLRB had ordered the election last July after more than 75 Co-Op miners signed a petition for a union election with the government agency.

Following a strike that lasted nearly 10 months, the NLRB ruled that the miners were illegally fired and ordered C.W. Mining, which is owned by the Kingston family, to reinstate every miner. The strikers returned to work July 12.

NLRB Region 27 ruled November 18 that supervisory personnel and relatives of the Kingston family would not be eligible to vote. The company appealed this decision to the national NLRB. Because of the appeal, Kingston family members were permitted to vote in the December 17 election, but their ballots were sealed, pending a ruling by the national labor board. The bosses also challenged most of the ballots of the some 40 pro-UMWA miners. Election results will not be announced until the NLRB rules on these challenges.

The struggle has received widespread support and solidarity in the United States, especially in the West, as well as other countries.

Almost all the Co-Op miners who supported the UMWA were fired about a week before the union election. The company claimed these miners, many of whom had worked at the mine for many years, did not have proper work documents. There is only one pro-UMWA miner left working at the mine now.

While waiting for the results of the union election and the NLRB’s ruling on charges filed to reverse the mass firings, the miners have been looking for work in other area mines. Many Co-Op miners have succeeded. About 20, though, have not yet found employment.

The miners report that just about every day they receive letters of support, many with financial donations to the Co-Op Miners Fund, at the UMWA hall in Price, Utah. A letter dated January 4 was signed by William Kleckler and Ed Koucherick, president and recording secretary, respectively, of UMWA Local 1385, which organizes workers at the Seneca Mine in Hayden, Colorado. “We feel the dismissal of a significant number of the workers who were in the process of participating in the vote for union representation is an act that is very much in violation of the rules that you are in place to uphold,” says the letter, which is addressed to the NLRB. “We ask you to rule in favor of the workers in this matter and against C. W. Mining Co. We feel the election for representation needs to take place in a fair and equitable manner.”

The local also voted to send \$300 to the Co-Op Miners Fund, workers reported.

Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (PACE) Local 8-578 sent the following message to the miners: “Dear Brothers and Sisters: At our January union meeting, our local voted to send you a donation of \$1,000. Your uncompromising struggle for a real union and human dignity is an inspiring

Continued on Page 10

Palestinian elections

Continued from front page

Elections Commission, however, show that only 48 percent of eligible voters participated in the election. This compares to an 81 percent voter turnout for municipal elections on the West Bank last month, the *Washington Post* reported. Most media used the percentage of registered voters to claim the turnout was more than 70 percent. According to the BBC, however, only 60 percent of Palestinians eligible to vote in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip had been registered.

U.S. president George Bush said demagogically that the vote was “a historic day for the Palestinian people and the people of the Middle East.”

According to Agence France-Presse, “Before the voting was even over Sunday, a senior aide in Ariel Sharon’s office said the Israeli prime minister was ready to meet the winner—whose identity was never in doubt—‘as soon as possible.’” Sharon subsequently called Abbas to congratulate him for this election and discuss setting up a meeting with the new Palestinian Authority president.

Hundreds of election observers from abroad were on hand to put their stamp of approval on the results. Among them were former U.S. president James Carter and John Kerry, the Democratic presidential nominee in the recent U.S. elections.

Leading up to the vote, Abbas had made clear that the aim of the leading group within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that he represents is to put a formal end to the intifada, or uprising, that began in September 2000. “The use of weapons in the current intifada is damaging and must cease,” he said in a December 14 interview with a London-based, Arabic-language daily. Abbas has been chairman of the PLO since the death in November of longtime PLO leader Yasir Arafat.

Tel Aviv has been gaining ground in its assault on armed Palestinian groups that have been at the center of the resistance to the Israeli occupation over the past four years.

On January 4, the Israeli spy agency Shin Bet reported that there was a sharp decline in 2004 of successful armed attacks by Palestinians against Israelis. A total of 117 Israelis died in attacks, a decline of 45 percent from the year before, Shin Bet said. The Associated Press reported that 796 Palestinians were killed in armed attacks in 2004. A total of 1,016 Israelis and 3,414 Palestinians have been killed in the four years of warfare.

Shin Bet reported that there were 15 suicide attacks carried out in 2004, a drop from 26 the year before, while 365 attacks were thwarted.

One of the reasons the spy agency cites for the decline in attacks is Tel Aviv’s construction of large sections of a more than 400-mile wall that will redraw the map of the West Bank.

New Israeli gov’t coalition

The day after the Palestinian election, the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, approved 58 to 56 a coalition government headed by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of the Likud Party. Six members of parliament abstained in the vote. The government now includes the Labor Party. Its central leader, Shimon Peres, will be the administration’s Vice Premier.

Israeli officials viewed the Palestinian election as a step forward for their plans. “There is a new legitimate Palestinian leadership whose leaders definitely are against terror and war,” Peres said, praising Abbas.

The basis for the new coalition is Labor’s support for Sharon’s “disengagement” plan, under which Tel Aviv would grant secondary concessions to the Palestinians with the aim of consolidating the long-term viability of Israel as a junior imperialist power in the Middle East. Sharon has proposed withdrawing the 7,500 Israeli settlers from the occupied Gaza Strip and dismantling a few minor settlements on the West Bank—while maintaining the largest settlement blocs, refusing to accept the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and maintaining control over Jerusalem.

The election of a Palestinian Authority president that the Israeli government can

“work with” marks another step in the “peace” process between Tel Aviv and the PLO that started with the 1993 Oslo accord. This process has been the product of the inability of the Israeli rulers to crush the Palestinian resistance, on the one hand, and the PLO leadership’s increasingly bourgeois course, on the other—turning its eyes away from the ranks of the fighting Palestinian people and toward accommodation with Washington, bourgeois Arab regimes in the region, and ultimately Tel Aviv.

Since the intifada began, groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad—bourgeois organizations that advocate “driving the Jews into the sea” and establishing an “Islamic republic” in Palestine—claimed the mantle of the armed struggle, focusing on suicide bombings and targeting mostly civilians in Israel.

Tel Aviv has used this reality to target these groups with virtual impunity, and to rationalize its attacks against any Palestinian who dares resist the Israeli occupation as part of “fighting terrorism.”

Hamas and Islamic Jihad called for a boycott of the presidential elections but did not attempt to disrupt them.

The Israeli campaign of assassinations of Hamas and other armed groups has worn down and sparked divisions within these organizations. Hamas spokesperson Mushir al-Masri said after the elections, “We will work with Mahmoud Abbas in what we believe is a sensitive coming period,” AFP reported. Hamas fielded candidates in the December municipal elections, and plans to do so again in parliamentary elections in July.

The Israeli government, for its part, eased some restrictions on Palestinian movements in the West Bank and Gaza because it hoped for a large voter turnout to boost the “legitimacy” of the Abbas administration. Tel Aviv removed some military checkpoints to allow voters to reach polling stations. And, during the campaign, it allowed Abbas freedom of movement to campaign throughout the occupied territories. In contrast, Abbas’s predecessor, Yasir Arafat, had been confined by the Israeli military for years to the Palestinian Authority’s West Bank headquarters.

Lesser-known candidates, however, faced harassment by the occupation forces. Mustafa Bargouthi, a doctor who was backed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and came in second in the presidential race, was detained by Israeli police while campaigning in Jerusalem and beaten along with supporters at a checkpoint outside of Jenin. He was



Reuters/Ahmed Jadallah

January 4 funeral for Jaber Kaseeh in Beit Lahiya, Gaza Strip. Kaseeh and six others were killed the day before when an Israeli tank fired at a nearby strawberry field where the youth were working. Tel Aviv continued such raids through Palestinian elections.

allowed to enter Gaza, but his campaign aides were not. Palestinian Peoples Party candidate Bassam Salhi was also detained while campaigning in East Jerusalem.

In East Jerusalem, however, Israeli forces restricted the movement of Palestinian voters, the *Washington Post* reported. While 5,400 Palestinians were permitted to vote at post offices within the boundaries of the city, “about 115,000 voters from East Jerusalem were required to cast ballots at 12 polling stations outside the city,” the *Post* said, creating a turnout it called “extraordinarily low.”

By mid-afternoon January 9, Palestinian officials in major West Bank cities were complaining that few Palestinians had come out to vote. The elections director in Ramallah told reporters that only 43 percent of those eligible nationally had gone to the polls, while Sana Amad, the elections director in Nablus, said only 400 of 1,840 registered there had voted. “The feeling here is that the situation is not going to change and that none of the candidates can change it,” Amad told the *Washington Post*. “It’s very pessimistic.”

Worried about the credibility of the result, Palestinian officials relaxed voting regulations, the Israeli daily *Ha’aretz* reported January 10. “Around 5 p.m. Sunday, the Palestinian Central Election Committee extended the voting to 9 p.m. and also allowed Palestinians to vote solely based on their identity cards, without any need to check them against the voter roll or population registry,” said *Ha’aretz*.

“I did not vote, because this election is designed to support the American plan

for the Middle East,” said Ziyad Abbas, co-director of the Ibdar Cultural Center in the Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, in a January 11 phone interview with the *Militant*. “This is a vote under military occupation—like the election in Afghanistan and the upcoming vote in Iraq. It is to provide cover for the American and Israeli agenda. In our case it’s a little different because it is an Israeli, not American occupation. But the design of ‘democracy’ is the same.”

Ziyad Abbas said that just an hour before the interview, Israeli troops had assassinated an Al-Aqsa Brigades member in the West Bank town of Tulkarem. The Israeli government “is planning new attacks in the Gaza Strip,” he said. “They want to destroy Palestinian factions, dismantle our military structures, and set them back 10 years.”

In the lead-up to the elections, Israeli troops continued offensive operations in the Gaza Strip. In one attack January 4, an Israeli tank shell killed seven Palestinians working in a strawberry patch in Gaza, many of them children. Mahmoud Abbas received a rebuke from Washington and Tel Aviv for referring to the Israeli forces that fired the shell as the “Zionist enemy” during a campaign stop in Gaza.

On January 11, Tel Aviv announced plans to begin construction of a trench along the southern border of the Gaza Strip aimed at stopping tunnels used by armed groups to smuggle weapons into the territory. The dugout will involve demolishing up to 3,000 homes in the Rafah refugee camp along the frontier with Egypt.

Iran opens military site to UN ‘inspectors’

BY CINDY JAQUITH

Officials of the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced January 5 that the government of Iran has decided to allow UN inspectors to enter its Parchin military complex. U.S. officials claim the military site contains an area where a nuclear warhead program is under way.

The site is about 20 miles southeast of the Iranian capital, Tehran. IAEA director general Mohammed ElBaradei said his inspectors will visit Parchin “within days or weeks.” On January 9, the Iranian government said the inspectors will be permitted to take samples of soil in the military base.

Since 2002, Washington has been campaigning against Iran’s right to develop its nuclear power industry, insisting the country’s atomic energy program is secretly aimed at building a nuclear bomb. The Iranian government has countered that nuclear power is needed for peaceful purposes, in order to develop the country’s economy. Tehran argues that power generated from nuclear plants would allow it to meet the country’s growing energy needs while reducing dependency on petroleum and at the same time exporting more oil in order to use the hard currency earned from such sales for development of industry and infrastructure.

In October 2003, under intense pressure, Tehran decided to open some nuclear facilities to IAEA inspection. In November 2004, Tehran agreed after negotiations

with the governments of France, Britain, and Germany, to put a hold on enriching uranium, one of the steps necessary to produce fuel for nuclear power plants. At the time, Tehran said the agreement meant only a temporary suspension of uranium enrichment, which is not prohibited under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty that Iran has signed. Following this, the IAEA did not request Iran’s case go before the UN Security Council for possible sanctions at its meeting in November, as Washington has been pushing for.

ElBaradei subsequently told the Associated Press he will “continue to keep the board updated” on Iran, but expects the investigation of Iran to drop to “routine reporting” over the next six months. Rather, he said, north Korea should be viewed as “the No. 1 security threat.”

According to the *New York Times*, ElBaradei said “that applying slow, constant pressure on Iran would yield more results than immediately taking the country to the UN Security Council for sanctions, the path the Bush administration has advocated. ElBaradei has never publicly accused Iran of hiding a weapons program, as the Bush administration has, and instead has asked Iran to allow inspectors access to a lengthening list of sites.”

The UN weapons chief’s failure to cooperate fully with Washington has led to an open U.S. campaign to remove ElBaradei from the post. According to the January 8 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the U.S. government’s goal is to remove him by June,

“opening the way for a replacement more to the Bush administration’s liking—one harder on Iran and other nations on the U.S. nasty list.” The Seattle daily reported that Washington has wiretapped ElBaradei’s phone conversations “in attempts to show he was demonstrating favoritism toward Iran in his investigation of its nuclear activities.” To remove ElBaradei from the IAEA executive position would require support from 12 other member states of the group’s 35-nation board of governors.

Some commentators in the big-business media are raising the possibility of a military strike in the near future to cripple Iran’s nuclear program. In a column in the December 4 *Financial Times*, Philip Coggan noted that a military attack on Iran “does not mean an invasion. The U.S. could mount air strikes to try to eliminate Iran’s nuclear facilities or it could encourage Israel to do so. Twenty years ago, Israel attacked a nuclear power plant in Iraq.”

Others disagree that such strikes could effectively cripple Tehran’s potential to build nuclear arms. An article by David Sanger in the December 12 *New York Times* said, “The Iranians remember Osirak, the site of a lightning Israeli air strike against an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 that set back Saddam Hussein’s nuclear ambitions by a decade. American and European intelligence officials say Iran has taken the lesson to heart, spreading its nuclear facilities around the country, burying some underground and putting others in the middle of crowded urban areas.”

SWP in 1964: ‘Federal troops to Mississippi!’

The following is a statement by Clifton DeBerry, Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. president in 1964, issued right after the June 21, 1964, murder of three civil rights workers—James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—by racists in Philadelphia, Mississippi. It was first published as the lead on the front page of the June 29, 1964, *Militant*, under the banner headline, “Demand Troops for Mississippi!” We reprint it on the occasion of the recent arrest of Ku Klux Klan leader Edgar Ray Killen, charged by the county district attorney—more than 40 years after the crime—with the murder of the three civil rights workers. The brutal execution, and refusal of the Democratic administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson to bring the culprits to justice at the time, were catalysts for the radicalization across the country of students and other youth, many of whom took part in the Freedom Summer and other actions to register Blacks to vote and tear down Jim Crow segregation in the South.

BY CLIFTON DEBERRY

The atrocity against three young and courageous civil-rights workers in Mississippi demonstrates the imperative need of federal action in that state. I call upon President Johnson to immediately deputize and arm the Negroes of Mississippi and

to dispatch federal troops there to prevent further violence against civil-rights workers, to restore law and order, and to enforce the U.S. Constitution.

The white-supremacist forces in Mississippi include not only the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council but also the state and local officials at every level. I am a Negro from Mississippi, and I know that these racists cannot be persuaded by any moral argument. They are prepared to defend the system of segregation by any means including the most heinous and brutal crimes. The only language they can understand is the language of force and the federal government should provide that force in sufficient magnitude.

The occupation force should arrest and throw into jail every cop or other official in any way connected with the kidnapping of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney. Just before they were kidnapped the three young men were arrested by the racist police in Philadelphia, Miss. It was reported that the rights fighters looked like they had been beaten by the police.

This kidnapping is the latest atrocity in a long list of crimes against Negroes in Mississippi. No one has ever been punished for the murder of Emmett Till, Mack Charles Parker, Medgar Evers, and many others. There have been five murders by racists in Mississippi in recent months alone.

When the first group of voter registration



From left: Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, and Michael Schwerner—three civil rights workers murdered in 1964 by Ku Klux Klan in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

workers, with two of the kidnapped youths among them, was training in Oxford, Ohio, they were addressed by John Doar of the U.S. Attorney General’s office. “What are you going to do this summer to enable us to see the fall?” was one of the angry questions directed to Doar. When Doar provided a lame defense of the Johnson administration’s refusal to protect them, he was met with boos and hisses.

While the three kidnapped youths were in jail in Philadelphia, Miss., their co-workers became fearful for their safety, and telephoned the FBI in Jackson. The FBI agent, a Mr. F. H. Helgeson, refused to help and told the rights fighters that he wouldn’t have any more dealings with them. The federal government is aware of the situation in Mississippi. By not providing adequate protection for these young people who are helping U.S. citizens to register to vote, the administration shares responsibility for what has happened to the three young men.

John Lewis, Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and

Mrs. Rita Schwerner, wife of Michael Schwerner, have gone to Philadelphia, Miss. Will President Johnson protect their rights and their lives?

President Johnson has sent troops into South Vietnam and all over the world. Whenever U.S. interests, as he sees them, are threatened, he is quick to act. But when Negroes and civil-rights workers are systematically brutalized by the illegally elected white-supremacist government of Mississippi, and when that government tramples the Bill of Rights daily, he cannot find the means to protect the lives of the people he is supposed to represent or to defend the Constitution he is sworn to defend.

Johnson’s record indicates he will not carry out his duty to protect Negroes from the racists. Negroes should not wait for him to act. In Mississippi, they have the right and duty to organize and arm themselves for self-defense. In the rest of the country there should be mass demonstrations putting unbearable heat on Johnson to send troops to Mississippi and to deputize Negroes there.

U.S. gov’t inaction encouraged lynchings in Mississippi

The article below first appeared in the July 13, 1964, *Militant*, under the headline, “Johnson’s Refusal to Act is Encouraging More Lynchings in Mississippi.”

BY BARRY SHEPPARD

James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, the three young civil rights workers missing in Mississippi, must now be presumed dead—lynched by police and white supremacists. While the search for their bodies continues, the racist reign of terror in that state mounts.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], spearhead of the fight for justice there, charges that “Mississippi law enforcement officials and private citizens are engaged in a conspiracy to harass and intimidate local Negroes and civil-rights workers through cross-burnings, beatings, shootings and illegal arrests.”

Despite these well-known facts, President Johnson stubbornly refuses to intervene to protect the lives of Negroes and civil-rights workers in Mississippi. Though his oath of office obliges him to protect their constitutional rights, he is defaulting in this duty lest he offend the powerful Southern wing of the Democratic Party. Thus he has turned a deaf ear to pleas to send federal troops or marshals to Mississippi and to deputize and arm Negroes there.

Instead of sending troops, Johnson has utilized a number of publicity gimmicks to give the impression that he is “doing something.” None of these gimmicks extends federal protection to Mississippi Negroes or civil-rights workers or cuts into the power of the state’s Negro-hating officials and racist organizations.

Johnson’s first gimmick was to send spy-master Allen Dulles, former CIA head, to Mississippi. When the headlines subsided, it turned out that Dulles’ mission was only a fact-finding junket consisting mainly of having a conversation with the Governor.

James Forman, executive secretary of SNCC, along with other Mississippi Negroes, managed to see Dulles. Forman told him the federal government must honor “repeated requests made by local and national civil-rights leaders for a federal protective force in Mississippi.” But Johnson ignored this plea and many others.

Johnson’s second gimmick was to order a few hundred U.S. sailors (they were first announced as Marines) to the area where the civil-rights workers had disappeared. But the sailors were first disarmed by Johnson’s order and their mission was not protection but merely to help search for the bodies.

SNCC has chronicled some of the harassment Mississippi civil-rights workers have been subjected to in the week following the disappearance of the three young men:

On June 21, the day of the disappearance, police in Ruleville stopped a carload of summer volunteers for “questioning”; ordered other volunteers off the street in Clarksdale; jailed a civil-rights worker James Brown on a trumped-up charge of “reckless driving” in Mayben. SNCC worker Andrew Barnes in Natchez barely escaped ten men who broke into his car and stole literature and personal items.

On June 23 three homes were bombed in McComb. Two reporters were chased from Ruleville to Greenwood at speeds up to 90 miles per hour. In Jackson a Negro man was shot twice in the head while following two white men who had fired into a Negro cafe.

Whites in cars circled the Negro community in Ruleville June 24, throwing bottles at cars and homes. Armed whites met voter registration workers in Drew. SNCC worker Morton Thomas was ordered from Hollandale by the mayor and police chief who

said he could not do voter-registration work without a permit. In Canton a car used by voter-registration workers was shot into, and CORE worker Scott Smith barely missed being hit by a shotgun blast.

Five more bomb threats occurred in McComb the same day; 40 M-1 rifles were stolen from a National Guard armory in Collins.

A white man set fire to a hall used for registration meetings in Moss Point, and two white SNCC volunteers were held overnight without charges. In Jackson a Negro minister’s home was shot into, and in Clarksdale Police Chief Collins threatened to beat volunteer Fred Winyard....

Eight voter-registration workers were jailed in Columbus on June 26, and CORE worker Ed Hollander was beaten in a Jackson jail. In Ruleville on June 27 a pro civil-rights white minister was prevented from attending a white church by the mayor. Night-riders fired into a volunteers’ car on June 28 in Hattiesburg; the following day Pete Stoner, white SNCC field secretary, was arrested on two traffic charges in the same city.

Klansman indicted in Mississippi 40 years later

Continued from front page

to vote. The effort was part of “Freedom Summer,” which drew young volunteers from around the country to Mississippi to join one of the central campaigns of the civil rights movement. Chaney was from Meridian, Mississippi; Schwerner and Goodman were from New York City.

The three disappeared June 21, 1964, after driving to the Mount Zion Baptist Church in Neshoba County to investigate the Ku Klux Klan’s burning of the church and beating of its members five days earlier. Two days later, FBI agents found the burnt-out station wagon they were driving in a swamp northeast of Philadelphia, Mississippi. Forty-four days after their disappearance, the bodies of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman were found buried 15 feet beneath an earthen dam.

Killen, a widely acknowledged Klan leader in Neshoba County at the time of the murders, was one of 19 suspects indicted February 1967 on federal charges of depriving the three civil rights workers of their constitutional rights. Only seven of the suspects were convicted and none served more than six years in prison. At the time, Killen’s case resulted in a mistrial and he was released. The state of Mississippi never brought mur-

der charges against those responsible for the killings until Killen’s indictment last week.

Eight of the original defendants are still alive, but it is not clear whether more indictments will be handed down. Some of those charged in the 1967 case told investigators at the time that Killen had helped recruit and organize the Klan party that hunted down, beat, shot, and buried Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner.

In 1999, the state attorney general’s office reopened the case after the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* published excerpts from a sealed interview that state archives officials had with Sam Bowers, former “Imperial Wizard” of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. In the interview, Bowers admitted his role in the murders of the three civil rights workers. Referring to Killen, Bowers said, “I was quite delighted to be convicted and have the main instigator of the entire affair walk out of the courtroom a free man.” Bowers was one of the seven convicted on conspiracy charges. He is currently serving a life sentence in a Mississippi prison for ordering the 1966 firebombing in Hattiesburg that killed NAACP leader Vernon Dahmer, Sr. He was convicted of that crime in 1998.

Pressure to actively pursue the case has been mounting in recent months. In May

2004, the Philadelphia Coalition was formed to press county, state, and federal officials to make renewed efforts to investigate the murders and bring those responsible to justice. Hundreds attended a June 20 meeting at the Neshoba County Coliseum to mark the 40th anniversary of the slayings and back the call to reopen the case. The meeting drew residents of Neshoba County, Black and white; veterans of the civil rights movement; family members of the slain volunteers; students and other young people from around the state; and many others. Shortly after Killen’s arraignment, a bomb threat was phoned in to the Neshoba County Courthouse. Killen’s brother reportedly knocked down a television cameraman to the ground outside the courthouse at the January 7 arraignment.

Since 1989, officials in Mississippi and five other states have reexamined 23 killings from the civil rights movement and made 27 arrests. Of those arrested, there have been 21 convictions, two acquittals, and one mistrial.

Meanwhile, the Jackson City Council voted in December to change the name of the city’s airport to the Jackson-Evers International Airport. Medgar Evers was a leader of the Mississippi NAACP who was murdered by the Klan in 1963.

Struggle for land in Venezuela

Continued from front page
director of Venezuela’s National Land Institute (INTi), told the press the government will inspect more than 40,000 privately held land titles—some dating back to 1847—to determine if they were obtained illegally. Those who can’t provide adequate documentation may lose their land. Idle farms or large estates that are deemed unproductive will also be taken over by the state and distributed to landless families who want to cultivate the land.

“We hope to issue 100,000 land grants within the next six months,” Otaiza said.

That would be a significant acceleration of land redistribution. According to figures provided by INTi, about 115,000 landless peasant families obtained titles to more than 9 million acres of land between the enactment of land reform legislation in the fall of 2001 and the end of 2004. Otaiza said that last year the government granted to landless peasants titles to 40,000 plots of land—some 4.2 million acres total—all of which was state owned. INTi was set up by the Chávez government to monitor land claims by peasants.

Another peasant in San Carlos, Eduardo Marcano, told the *Militant* that to meet the hunger for land many of the large estates held by big farmers or agribusiness will have to be nationalized and turned over to those who want to work the land. This was echoed by Sarmiento and others interviewed by the *Militant*. “The *terracogientes* took most of this land by force in the past,” Marcano said. He was using a derisive term he coined—which is a play on the Spanish word *terratenientes* (land owners)—to describe the big capitalist farmers. Marcano’s term means “land grabbers.”

Fight for land, means to till it

Hundreds of thousands of peasants have been pushing for land and the means to till it the last three years, since the government adopted the Law on Land and Agricultural Development. One of dozens of measures passed in 2001, this legislation has been among the most controversial.

According to the census from 1998, when Chávez was first elected president, about 1,000 big farmers—5 percent of all farmers and ranchers—owned 75 percent of the country’s arable land. That survey said that 90 percent of the land distributed to landless families under a 1960 agrarian reform had since returned to the hands of large landholders.

Braulio Alvarez, an officer of INTi, told the *Militant* in 2002 that some 350,000 peasant families, who owned between 3 and 50 acres each, produced about 70 percent of vegetables and other major crops. Hundreds of thousands of other rural producers do not own any land. Peasants comprise about 13 percent of the country’s population of more than 24 million, according to a 1997 estimate.

The 2001 agricultural law allowed the state to confiscate private farms of more than 5,000 hectares (12,350 acres) that were idle or unproductive, and distribute the land to those who would produce to survive and supply the domestic market. It also created legal means for peasants and indigenous people to place claims for stolen land.

Government officials said that one aim of the legislation was to boost Venezuela’s agricultural production. The country currently imports more than 60 percent of its food, while a good portion of its arable land remains idle.

Although the government has kept the official exchange rate of the country’s currency at about 2,000 bolivars to U.S. \$1, the dollar was being exchanged for 2,700 bolivars on the black market last spring. Every devaluation of the bolivar, official or de-facto, means higher prices for many foodstuffs.

As peasants and other working people fought to implement the 2001 measures, they angered many capitalists and landlords and their U.S. allies. Many in the capitalist class rebelled and tried to unseat the elected government with support from Washington. Their attempts included an April 2002 military coup, an employers’ lockout at the end of that year, and a presidential recall referendum last August. All have failed because of mass mobilizations by workers and peasants. Through their actions, working people divided the military in April 2002, leading to the quick restoration of the Chávez government. They also restored production during

the bosses’ “strike” and thwarted the electoral coup last summer.

January 10 decree

Despite these setbacks to the pro-imperialist opposition to the Chávez administration, big farmers and agribusinesses have succeeded to a large degree in blocking or slowing down implementation of most of the far-reaching provisions of the 2001 land reform.

“Mission Zamora is an effort to meet the demands of the peasants,” said Wikénferd Oliver in a January 9 interview. A leader of the Youth of the Fifth Republic Movement (JVR), which is affiliated to the governing party, Oliver comes from a peasant family and worked for INTi until last year. “With this announcement by the president, we will begin to see more social justice in the countryside,” he said.

Oliver was referring to the decree Chávez was set to announce the next day. Its proclamation coincided with the anniversary of the death of Ezequiel Zamora, after whom the government measure was named. Zamora was a leader of the Venezuelan independence struggle against colonial rule by Spain who fought to expropriate land and give it to the peasants. He was killed in battle Jan. 10, 1860, in San Carlos.

“The president said that current land ownership was an outrageous situation,” said the BBC News on January 11, referring to Chávez. “But the decree itself is more modest than many expected.”

Its main measure is the establishment of a commission, nationally and in each state, that will review titles of thousands of private farms this year and determine whether they were obtained legally. The commissions will also rule on whether many of the country’s rural estates are idle or productive and provide a legal framework for the rapid settlement of land claims by peasants.

Its objective, the decree says, is “the reorganization of the ownership and use of agricultural land to gradually eliminate latifundia [big landholdings] in the country’s rural areas, through the involvement of groups of people and organized communities, in order to guarantee rational use of natural resources and improve agricultural production.”

Dispute at El Charcote

Rafael Alemán, head of the new agricultural commission in Cojedes, told re-

porters at El Charcote ranch January 10 that it would take his commission about 90 days to determine which areas of the estate were productive. “Landowners have nothing to fear if it’s their property and it’s productive,” he said.

“We are not here to expropriate, we are here to do justice,” said Yañez, the governor of Cojedes, who arrived along with the National Guard troops. “Those with land that is not idle and who have farms in production will enjoy our support.”

Sam Vestey, whose family is among the wealthiest in the United Kingdom, told the *Financial Times*, “We’ve been in Venezuela for just over 100 years and we hope to be there for some time yet.” His great grandfather had bought the land in 1903, Vestey claimed. Agropecuaria Flora C.A., which operates the ranch, is a subsidiary of the Vestey Group Ltd.

The Vestey Group has extensive land holdings and cattle ranches in Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela. The capitalist family invested heavily in beef production in South America over the last century and then set up a shipping company, Blue Star Line, to send meat to Britain, according to the *Telegraph*, a UK daily. It also built the Dewhurst chain of butcher shops in Britain, which shut down in 1995. The *Financial Times* said Vestey’s wealth is estimated at \$1.4 billion.

“We try our best to coexist with the squatters while authorities decide what they are going to do with the ranch,” said Miguel Espana, a ranch manager at El Charcote, according to the Associated Press. “Uncertainty reigns here,” he added. “I know one thing for sure: this ranch will never be what it once was.”

According to AP, El Charcote, 125 miles southwest of Caracas, had 11,000 cattle four years ago. It now has less than 5,000 and managers have cut the workforce from about 50 to 30.

Government officials say Vestey’s business obtained titles illegally and much of the property actually belongs to the state.

It is clear, however, that the actions by some 600 peasants who are occupying the land have prompted the government to act. “We have to recognize that we have not



Militant/Argiris Malapanis

Peasant Angel Sarmiento accompanies *Militant* reporters July 21, 2002, to part of El Charcote ranch occupied by peasants on outskirts of San Carlos, capital of Cojedes state, Venezuela.

given a fast and timely answer to these poor farmers,” said Luis Silva, regional director of Venezuela’s Agriculture and Land Ministry, according to AP. “We have a social debt with them.”

Zinc-roofed shacks made of dried mud, timber, and bamboo stalks now overlook meadows where cattle graze. Peasants have put up their own barbed wire to keep herds from trampling corn, eggplant, plantains, squash, melon, and other crops.

“I trust Chávez and believe he wants the best for us, but we are struggling, working land that may not belong to us in the end,” Santiago Arzola told AP. Arzola, 40, reportedly farms watermelon, beans, and sweet peppers to sustain a family of five.

‘Only shovels and machetes’

In a visit to El Charcote in July 2002, peasants told the *Militant* how the occupation unfolded. “The thugs of the English company started shooting at us,” said Angel Sarmiento, who was part of the initial takeover of part of the ranch by 400 farm families in early 2001. “We took the land peacefully,” he added. “We had only
Continued on Page 9

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Retch of the week—Illinois county workers are being chopped. At the Union County wildlife ref-



Harry Ring

uge, a number have been fired, including Arthur Burchyett, 64, a mechanic. His work was so well regarded that when he was disabled eight years ago, the state provided him a wheelchair. Now, along with his pink slip, was a notice to return the wheelchair.

Airport “security”—In a flight from Amsterdam, 300 Northwest passengers were stuck over Seattle in a dense fog. They circled the airport for a time and then were diverted to Moses Lake, Washington. But they were held on board. Food and water ran out. The toilets broke down. Finally, pizza and soda were brought in and the toilets repaired. After a total delay of 18 hours they deplaned. What kept them on board? “Security.” The airport had no customs screeners. Finally, a sheriff and his posse came in to pinch hit.

Bad enough, but doesn’t stop with kids—Nationwide, cops tote an arsenal. It includes guns, “batons,” king-size flashlights more

deadly than “batons,” pepper spray, rubber bullets and, in spreading use, the high-voltage stun gun peddled by Taser International. Taser argues that the gun can be used safely against humans aged two to 75.

Last month the *Miami Herald* devoted a page to Taser’s proposition: Is the stun gun safely used against children? This came after Miami/Dade cops used Tasers against a boy six, and a girl 12. The paper interviewed “experts” generally skeptical of using Tasers on children. But no one suggested that cops should be stripped of all weapons—to safeguard all ages!

Simple: ‘For light rumps only’—BMW is recalling about

75,000 of its luxury cars. They plan to repair a high-end feature—heated seat mats. They’ve learned that as the pads get thinner, they become too hot.

Button up your overcoat—“A report by the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless estimates the homeless population of Denver is five times bigger now than it was in 1988.... The coalition estimates the homeless population will soon top the 11,000 mark.”—News item.

The Labour gov’t—In England, women from ethnic minorities lack adequate care and are twice as likely as white women to die during child birth or soon after. That’s

in the National Health Service hospitals, as reported by research of the Maternity Alliance.

Check out Lenin’s ‘Imperialism’—The Boston Financial Corp. was the seventh largest U.S. bank, until last April when Bank of America, the third largest, gobbled it up. Charles Gifford was chairman of the Boston bank and Bank of America let him hold the title for eight months. He departs with a cushy severance package—a \$16.4 million check, \$50,000 a year for four-years of “consulting services,” use of a company jet plane, and, perhaps the clincher, guaranteed season tickets for the Boston Red Sox.

Newspaper workers strike in Youngstown, Ohio

BY ROMINA GREEN

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio—“The support of other unions in the area has been wonderful,” said Laure Cioffi, a member of the Newspaper Guild/Communication Workers of America Local 34011 on strike here against *The Vindicator* newspaper.

The 171 delivery drivers, reporters, photographers, copy editors, and secretaries walked out November 16, the day after their contract expired. They had been working under a wage freeze for four years. The union said about half of the local’s membership make less than \$9 per hour. Another 25 members of the Teamsters, which organizes the mailers, are honoring the picket line.

The company’s offer was a 1 percent pay increase in each of two years and a 2 percent raise the final year of the contract, with a floor of 10 cents per hour for the lowest paid. For the lowest-paid workers, the pay increase wouldn’t even cover the cost of parking in the pay lots owned by the newspaper. In addition, the company is trying to increase Guild members’ share of insurance premiums to 15 percent, while proposing

that new employees pay 25 percent.

“The major issues are a period of time that health premiums wouldn’t be paid by Guild members,” said Tony Markota, president of Local 34011. “Then, proper staffing of swing persons to eliminate overtime; status quo language as far as vehicles are concerned; and, finally, a fair wage scale.”

“A couple of Friday’s ago when it was snowing, a couple pulled up and offered the picketers coffee and hot chocolate. They were nurses,” explained Cioffi who was on picket duty that day. Cioffi said the strikers have received solidarity—in the form of money, canned goods, wood, and warm drinks—from many unions.

The strikers have launched a weekly newspaper, *The Valley Voice*. The paper covers their strike as well as local and international news. Local 34011 is urging working people and others in support to cancel their subscriptions to *The Vindicator* and subscribe to *The Valley Voice*. Donations and cards in support can be sent to: Newspaper Guild Local 34011, P.O. Box 1135, Youngstown, OH 44501.



Militant/Carole Lesnick

Members of Newspaper Guild/Communication Workers of America Local 34011 picket *Vindicator* December 31 in Youngstown, Ohio. The unionists walked out November 16 for a decent wage increase and against company demands for higher health payments.

Author Piero Gleijeses speaks in Los Angeles on Cuba, Africa

BY CHRIS REMPLE

LOS ANGELES—Piero Gleijeses, author of *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976*, spoke December 9 to more than 70 people at Santa Monica College. Gleijeses is a professor of American foreign policy at the Johns Hopkins University campus in Washington, D.C.

Gleijeses discussed the role of Cuban internationalist solidarity in aiding and defending national liberation struggles throughout Africa from the initial period after the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 through the 1970s. He pointed out that Cuba sent its first such aid to the Algerian revolutionaries waging a war of independence against French colonial rule. He described a plane that carried a load of weapons to the Algerian rearguard in Casablanca, Morocco, that returned to Cuba with war orphans and injured fighters.

In late 1965, Gleijeses said, the first Cuban fighters arrived in Angola to help the freedom fighters there struggling against Portuguese colonial rule. But from 1966 to 1975 their military assistance was limited to Guinea-Bissau. The major imperialist countries aided the apartheid government in South Africa and the Portuguese colonialists, he said, while other European countries sent only humanitarian aid to the liberation movements. The government of the Soviet Union sent military aid to the anticolonial movements, he added, but only the Cubans also sent volunteers to fight shoulder-to-shoulder with their sisters and brothers in Africa.

Gleijeses pointed to the importance of the doctors Cuba provided in the liberated region of Guinea-Bissau. “At least 70 percent of the medical care in the guerrilla areas was provided by Cubans,” he said.

Cuba sent troops to Angola in October 1975 following the invasion of the country by the army of South Africa’s apartheid regime for two reasons, Gleijeses said. On the one hand, he noted, the Cubans wanted to challenge U.S. imperialism wherever possible to weaken Washington’s allies and to help the liberation movements and governments friendly to Cuba. Secondly, he said, the Cuban revolutionaries believed that “Cuba had a duty to help other people” in fighting for their freedom.

In a question and answer period after his talk, one person asked whether there had been antiwar protests in Cuba during the years that 300,000 Cuban troops served in Angola. Gleijeses replied that no such protests took place because the stance of

the Cuban government was that no one was forced to go to Angola—only volunteers would be sent. He said that nothing in the research for his book had pointed to that position being ignored or sidestepped. In addition, a majority of the Cuban people identified with the political goal of aiding national liberation movements in Africa.

The meeting was sponsored by the Santa Monica College (SMC) Coalition in Solidarity with Cuba, five other student groups, the Los Angeles Coalition in Solidarity with Cuba, and others. Benny Blaydes, advisor to the SMC coalition, and an administrator with the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services department at Santa Monica College, was instrumental in bringing Gleijeses to the campus.

Peasants in Venezuela struggle for land

Continued from Page 8

shovels and machetes to defend ourselves. They killed several peasants and left many wounded.”

After the peasants threatened to make the deaths a national scandal, the federal government heeded their calls for protection, Sarmiento and others explained. National Guard troops were sent to the area and stayed for a few weeks until things calmed down. The peasants moved the cattle off the area they occupied, about half the ranch, formed cooperatives, and began cultivating the land. “None of them have ever been tried, however,” Sarmiento said, referring to those involved in the shootings.

Pedro Roja, another peasant who was also part of the initial occupation, described in 2002 how getting legal title to the land would be crucial for survival. “We use our hands and some oxen,” he said. “We don’t have tractors or other equipment. Without title to the land, there is no credit from the banks and we can’t claim insurance in the case of disaster. When rainstorms destroyed my melons and yucca earlier

this year, I couldn’t ask the government for compensation.”

A year later, Roja had left El Charcote and moved to another area of the country.

Sarmiento could not survive at El Charcote either. He went on making a living through contract farming and construction work.

In 2003, a local commander of the National Guard heeded calls by the ranch management and sent troops to El Charcote. They temporarily evicted most peasants occupying land there. The farmers then took over the regional offices of INTi and demanded a hearing from the president. After a delegation met with Chávez, the peasants were allowed back on the land they had been using.

“It’s been tough, but perseverance counts, and since 1998 we’ve been able to count on the government too, for the most part,” said Sarmiento. “We’ve also had to overcome problems among ourselves.”

According to an article in the January 10 *Financial Times*, in Cojedes, “two rival peasant-group factions, some aligned with

Continued on Page 11

—25 AND 50 YEARS AGO—



January 25, 1980

Washington has gone on a major propaganda drive to try to portray the Soviet assistance to the Kabul regime as an “invasion” aimed at the subjugation—in Carter’s words—of “an independent Islamic people.” This transparent attempt to isolate the Afghan revolution from other anti-imperialist struggles, particularly in the Middle East, has not been particularly successful.

Speaking in Beirut January 8, Yasir Abd Rabbou, the head of the Information Bureau of the Palestine Liberation Organization, declared the PLO’s support for the Soviet aid to Afghanistan. The Soviet intervention, he said, “is a big contribution to the struggle of all revolutionary forces opposing United States military expansionism in the Middle East.” He accused those Arab governments that denounced the Soviet move of having adopted a “reactionary” position. (Tokyo *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 9.)



January 24, 1955

The runaway plant problem continues to plague the labor movement. On January 13, the Otis Elevator Company informed its workers in Yonkers, N.Y. and Harrison, N.J. that unless they cooperated in cutting production costs, the company would move operations to an unnamed town in the Midwest.

The Yonkers plant employs 2,400 workers and is under contract with the CIO International Electrical Union. The Harrison plant employs 1,700 workers and is non-union, although both the CIO and the AFL are conducting organizing drives. Over 300 employees in Harrison average better than 20-year service.

The company issued its ultimatums at two special meetings called by the company in Yonkers and Harrison on Jan. 16, and also made demands upon the two city governments. What Otis wants is (1) a speed-up without increases in pay; (2) lower taxes.

Is it justice, 40 years later?

The indictment, 40 years later, against Edgar Ray Killen, a central leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi on the charge that he organized the murder of three civil rights workers is not exactly justice, as Mississippi farmer R.C. Howard, quoted in the front-page article in this issue, points out. The coverage in the capitalist press and focus of government officials on the Klan aims to continue the four-decades-long cover-up of federal government culpability in the lynching of the three civil rights workers and an untold number of others.

As Clifton DeBerry, the Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. president in 1964, pointed out in a statement issued immediately after the murders, the white-supremacist system known as Jim Crow included not only the Klan and White Citizens Council but state and local officials at every level too.

A local cop set up the murders by arresting the three men—James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—and holding them in jail until the KKK death squad could get in place. After he released them, the same cop led two carloads of Klansmen in chasing down the civil rights workers and killing them on a dark Mississippi road.

The FBI in the state had been told of the arrest of the three men by organizers of the Freedom Summer campaign, who expressed concern for their safety and asked for government intervention. The federal cops did nothing.

As DeBerry stated in 1964, the defenders of racist segregation could not be moved by moral arguments. He called on the Johnson administration to use government force in “sufficient magnitude” to protect Blacks and civil rights workers in Mississippi.

Johnson, often portrayed as a liberal icon, had no intention of rocking the boat with his fellow Dixiecrats, as most southern Democrats then called themselves. The Democratic Party was the majority party in the country and administered the racist segregation regime in the south. As Malcolm X often counseled young civil rights fighters, “A Dixiecrat is nothing but a Democrat in disguise.”

The murder of the three civil rights workers was the latest in a long list of crimes against Blacks in Mississippi to which the federal government turned a blind eye. When dredging crews combed the waters around Philadelphia, Mississippi, looking for Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner, they found several corpses of Black men.

For decades these murderers carried on with their lives into old age right in the communities where they committed their crimes. Their impunity rested on naked terror and federal government complicity. They often publicly boasted of their heinous acts, as did Byron de la Beckwith, convicted some 30 years after killing in 1963 NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers.

The killers of 14-year-old Emmett Till sold the story of their crime to a major magazine. They were acquitted by an all-white jury. When Till’s mother wrote President Dwight Eisenhower asking for the federal government to intervene, the Republican president didn’t even bother to acknowledge receipt of her letter.

Prosecutors claim that a 3,000-page transcript of the 1967 trial of some of the Klansmen involved in the murder of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner on the lesser charge of violation of their civil rights is critical evidence in the decision to finally bring murder charges. But there is no new evidence! Federal authorities have known all along who the perpetrators were. Save for

the persistent quest for justice by family members and protests by civil right groups demanding the reopening of the case, Killen would still be a free man.

The murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner and the inaction of the Johnson administration as the civil rights movement was blooming served as catalysts for a broader mass radicalization of students and other youth in the United States and deeply effected others around the world. James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner became household names to millions. Their courageous actions won thousands of youth, Black and white, to back the fight for Black rights—a decades-long mobilization led by Black workers and farmers.

The movement that overthrew Jim Crow had elements of a social revolution. It smashed the system that, through lynch mob terror, had enforced near peonage conditions on Blacks in large sections of the former southern slavocracy in the decades after the Civil War. Through the same brutal methods, Jim Crow enforced legal segregation and second-class status for Blacks for nearly a century.

The civil rights movement resulted in profound changes in the conditions and consciousness of the working class in the United States. It laid the basis for a broader unity of all working people in their fight against exploitation. It was under the pressure of this powerful social movement that Social Security was strengthened for all. The federal government’s moves to establish disability insurance, index Social Security for inflation, and establish Medicare and Medicaid, were all byproducts of this mass proletarian movement in the 1950s, 60s, and early 70s.

It takes such a movement, with revolutionary potential, to wrest long-lasting gains from the ruling class. But under capitalism, any reforms are eroded over time. While legal segregation is buried for good, racism remains necessary for the profit system. It can only be eliminated through a social revolution, wresting power from the hands of the exploiters, and building a society based not on profit and dog-eat-dog divisions, but on human solidarity—a socialist society.

Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman are working-class heroes. Their efforts, along with those of thousands of others who fought and died in the struggle against Jim Crow, helped bring one step closer prospects for such a social revolution. We point clearly to the injustice of the state of Mississippi moving 40 years after the crime to indict the Klansman who orchestrated their murders. At the same time, we join with R.C. Howard and others in demanding that Killen be swiftly convicted and that all of his accomplices be brought to justice—“buried in prison” for their heinous crimes.

For further reading

The Changing Face of U.S. Politics

by Jack Barnes

A handbook for workers, farmers, and youth repelled by the class inequalities, economic instability, racism, women’s oppression, cop violence, and wars endemic to capitalism.

In English, Spanish, and French. \$23

WWW.PATHFINDERPRESS.COM

Labor supports Utah miners’ fight

Continued from Page 5

example to workers everywhere. You have stood with us and we stand along side you in our collective fight for justice. Hasta la Victoria siempre! Venceremos.”

Many letters are being sent by individuals from towns and cities throughout Utah. Almost all the letters contain checks from \$25 to \$200, Co-Op miners say. A supporter from Bountiful wrote, “A small donation toward helping out the work of the miners. Wish it could be more.” The note in a card sent from Stansbury Park, said, “To the Miners, Your struggle for just treatment and fair wages are supported in prayers and monetarily. Be hopeful and strong!”

One recent letter to the miners from a supporter in Salt Lake City said, “They have put you Hispanics into human bondage also paying meager wages and no benefits for your families. Fight them-fight them-fight them. And go by the theme of the UMWA. ‘A Fair Day’s work for a fair day’s pay.’”

The miners report that many messages have come from people who said they had read about their struggle in the Utah newspaper the *Intermountain Catholic*. After sending a reporter to Huntington to interview the miners, the newspaper published a two-part series on the Co-Op miners in the December 14 and January 2 issues. Both articles ended with information about sending donations and messages to the miners.

One of the first letters of solidarity the miners received following the mass firing was from railroad workers in Minnesota. The letter was accompanied by

a \$1,000 donation, collected at an annual Christmas party for members of United Transportation Union Locals 650 and 1614 in South Saint Paul. The letter said the funds were donated “knowing the hardships and injustices you have endured, especially the recent firing of your members by the Co-Op Mine Company. We are railroad workers employed by the Union Pacific Railroad Co.... We have followed your inspiring struggle with great interest and support through the last year. We know that your fight is our fight. Any victory by working people anywhere strengthens the movement everywhere. Best wishes.”

The fired miners say funds continue to be urgently needed. They should be sent to: UMWA District 22, 525 East, 100 South, Price, UT 84501. Checks should be made out to the Co-Op Miners Fund. Messages of support can also be faxed to the UMWA at (435) 637-9456. For more information call the UMWA at (435) 637-2037.

Miners are also urging their supporters to continue to write, call, or fax the NLRB to protest the mass firings, demand reinstatement of the workers, and ask that the election be decided based on the November 18 NLRB ruling on who is eligible to vote. Letters to the NLRB should be sent to: National NLRB, Robert J. Battista, Chairman, 1099 14th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20570-0001; and NLRB Region 27, Director, B. Allan Benson, 600 17th St., 7th floor—North Tower, Denver, CO 80202-5433; Tel: (303) 844-3551; Fax: (303) 844-6249.

U.S. assaults in Iraq

Continued from front page

January 7 *New York Times*. The four provinces are: Baghdad; Anbar, which includes the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi; Nineveh, which contains Mosul; and Salahadin, which includes Tikrit, the hometown of Hussein. “Those are the four areas that we see enough attacks that we are going to continue to focus our energies,” Metz said. The U.S. officer said that stricter and broader curfews would be put in place near the time of the election. The Allawi regime announced the extension of the state of emergency it adopted last October in the lead-up to the U.S.-led assault on Fallujah.

Starting last November the U.S. military began massive ground and air operations aimed at destroying the best units of the former Iraqi military. The Baathists and their supporters were routed from their stronghold in Fallujah after a week of fighting. U.S. troops have continued to pursue them in Mosul, Ramadi, and other cities with a predominantly Sunni population where the Hussein regime had its strongest base.

Iraqi troops are supposed to provide security at some 9,000 polling places. Metz said U.S. troops will be held back, away from voting sites, but close enough to be called in when needed.

Meanwhile, a U.S. warplane dropped a 500-pound laser-guided bomb on a home near Mosul, killing 14 people, among them seven children, reported the *Washington Post*. According to the January 9 *Armed Forces Information Service*, a Pentagon publication, the bombing was part of a “cordon-and-search” operation to capture the leader of a Baathist military cell but struck the wrong target. The report said the U.S. military deeply regrets the loss of “possibly innocent lives.”

The next day the Iraqi interior ministry reported that at least five Iraqis, two police officers, and three civilians had been shot dead by U.S. troops at a checkpoint in Yussifiyah. Just nine miles south of Baghdad, Yussifiyah is part of a string of cities comprising a Baathist stronghold known as the “Triangle of Death.” The Marines claimed they opened fire after their convoy struck a roadside bomb, al-Jazeera TV reported. The U.S. military has subsequently denied involvement in the deaths, saying they were the result of “insurgent fire.”

On January 10, Britain’s defense secretary Geoffrey Hoon announced that London would send 400 additional troops to Iraq, the BBC reported. The deployment of members of the Cyprus-based First Battalion Royal Highland Fusiliers, would bring the number of London’s troops in Iraq to just over 9,000. The move highlights London’s firm support for Washington’s course in Iraq and the “war on terrorism.” Last November, the 850-strong Black Watch regiment took part in the U.S.-led assault on Fallujah and subsequent raids in the “Triangle of Death.” That regiment returned to Britain but London said another unit would be available if needed. “We have always said we would be prepared to send more troops to Iraq if necessary during the elections,” Hoon stated.

In escalating attempts to stop the January 30 elections, armed groups are carrying out deadly attacks on civilian and military targets. These have included gruesome acts, such as slitting the throats of policemen or executing election workers in broad daylight. The extent and character of the attacks is having an impact, as participation among Sunnis in the vote is expected to be minimal.

According to the Allawi administration, Baathists are suspected to be responsible for the recent assassination of Iraqi general Jassem al-Obaidi, the manager of Allawi’s Iraqi Accord Party. Al-Obaidi was shot while traveling in his car accompanied by his daughter. She is in critical condition, said a UPI dispatch.

The body of Ali Ghalib, the head of the Salahuddin provincial council, was found riddled with bullets, according to the January 9 *Washington Post*. Ghalib was abducted two days earlier while returning to Tikrit from Najaf, where he met with Shiite cleric Ali al-Sistani. Ghalib went to Najaf on behalf of Sunni political leaders seeking al-Sistani’s support for postponing the election. Ghalib’s relatives said they were told by Baathists that Ghalib faced execution if he was found to be cooperating with al-Sistani, according to the *Post*.

On January 10, the deputy police chief of Baghdad was killed along with his son, also a cop, as they left home to go to work, reported Reuters. The previous week the governor of Baghdad was killed along with several of his bodyguards. As many as 100 Iraqis, mostly from the fledgling Iraqi police and army, were assassinated in similar fashion the first week in January.

A prominent Sunni clerical group met with U.S. officials and offered to help call off a boycott of the elections if Washington set a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops, al-Jazeera TV reported. Leaders of the group added that ending the boycott doesn’t necessarily mean they would advocate taking part in the vote.

While pressuring Sunnis to participate, Washington and its allies are moving full steam ahead with the elections and haven’t acceded to any demands from Sunni groups. A U.S. embassy spokesman in Baghdad, Robert Callahan, said, “We have no intention to establish a timeline for withdrawal from Iraq at present.”

So far only the Iraqi Islamic Party, among the Sunni-led groups that had registered for the vote, has withdrawn from the election. The group, however, said it was not calling for a boycott.

“In that key area around Baghdad, there is no doubt about it at all, we’ve got to deal these people a blow,” British prime minister Anthony Blair told the BBC. Allawi has also rejected any postponement of the election. The top UN election official in Baghdad said Iraq must push ahead with the election or “plunge into crisis,” according to Reuters.

Meanwhile, in Fallujah only a few thousand of the 250,000 residents of the city have been allowed to return since its takeover by U.S. occupation forces, reported *USA Today*. Driving through the city its nearly impossible to pick out a structure that isn’t damaged, the U.S. daily said. Outside the city, hundreds of Iraqis stood in long lines cordoned off by barbed wire, according to the Knight Ridder news service. At the end of the line, a U.S. soldier sat at a table with an interpreter and asked people their name and marital status, finger printed them, and performed a retina scan for identification.

Retired U.S. military officers oppose nominee for attorney general

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON, D.C.—A dozen high-ranking retired military officers took the unusual step of expressing their “deep concern” in a letter to the Senate committee holding hearings on the nomination for U.S. attorney general of White House counsel Alberto Gonzales. The letter marks an exceptional military sortie into the debate over a civilian post. It is a sign of the deepening politicization and factionalism of the U.S. officer corps.

In the letter, also posted on the web site of the group Human Rights First, the officers

question the nomination of Gonzales because he has “played a significant role in shaping detention and interrogation operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo Bay, and elsewhere.” They say Gonzales advised President George Bush that the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war “did not apply” in the war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and that the “war on terrorism” renders those protections “obsolete.”

The signers of the letter include high-ranking retired officers from each branch of the U.S. armed services. Among the most prominent signers are: Army Gen. John Shalikashvili, former chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff; Marine Gen. Joseph Hoar, former chief of Central Command; former Air Force Chief of Staff Merrill McPeak; and Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy, the army’s first female three-star general. Several of the officers, including Shalikashvili, supported Democrat John Kerry’s campaign for U.S. president.

Repeating a theme used in the Kerry campaign, the letter argues that the policies of the Bush administration supported by Gonzales have “fostered greater animosity towards the United States.” The letter stops short of directly opposing Gonzales’s nomination. It instead calls on the Senate committee members to “explore in detail his views concerning the role of the Geneva Conventions in U.S. detention and interrogation policy and practice. Like other liberal critics of the Bush administration’s course in Afghanistan and Iraq the officers fundamentally agree with the “war on terrorism.”

N.Y. bus drivers strike to defend jobs, benefits



Militant/Róger Calero

JAMAICA, Queens—Around 50 drivers, mechanics, and garage workers gathered for midnight picket duty here January 9 to kick off their strike against the Green Bus Lines and Command Bus. The 1,000 members of Amalgamated Transit Union locals 1179 and 1181 are demanding the Metropolitan Transit Authority, which is planning on taking over the private lines, guarantee health-care benefits and job security.

—ARRIN HAWKINS

MILITANT LABOR FORUMS

NEW YORK

Manhattan

Mississippi Klansman Indicted 40 Years after Murder of Civil Rights Workers: What Was Won and What Remains in the Fight against Racist Oppression?

Speaker: Sam Manuel, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Jan. 21. Dinner 7 p.m.; Program: 8 p.m. 307 W 36th St. 10th floor (north elevators) Donation: \$5 dinner; \$5 program. Tel: (212) 629-6649.

PENNSYLVANIA

Pittsburgh

The Face of Imperialism: Torture and the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan Speaker: Cindy Jaquith, Socialist Workers Party. Sat., Jan. 28, 7:30 p.m. 5907 Penn Ave., Room 225. Donation: \$4. Tel: (412) 365-1090.

TEXAS

Houston

The Fight for Abortion Rights Today Speaker: Jaquie Henderson, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Jan. 21, 7:30 p.m. 4800 W 34th St., Suite C51A. Tel: (713) 869-6550.

NEW ZEALAND

Christchurch

Self-Determination for Palestine! Oppose Israel’s War against Palestine!

Speaker: Stuart Needham, Communist League. *The Gloucester Arcade (near Theater Royal), 129-131 Gloucester St.* Donation: \$3. Tel: (03) 365-6055.

CALENDAR

CALIFORNIA

San Francisco

Defend Women’s Health and Rights: On the 32nd Anniversary of Roe v. Wade Sat., Jan. 22, Rally 10 a.m. at Powell and Market, March 11 a.m. to the Embarcadero. Sponsored by the San Francisco Area Pro-Choice Coalition Tel: (415) 890-1020 x209.

Continued from Page 9

the local governor and others opposing him, are at odds in their hunger for land.”

Asked about this, Sarmiento acknowledged that divisions did exist among those occupying El Charcote. “The whole problem was created by the factionalism of José Pimenter, who was in Chávez’s party, but decided to run against governor Yañez in last year’s elections and tried to use us to pump up his campaign. I gave him a donation early on, but then saw the danger.” Sarmiento said he and other peasants are now trying to put these differences behind them and unite in their quest for land.

Sarmiento noted that “the English” hold a lot more land in Cojedes beyond El Charcote. “There’s much to be done,” he said.

Class dynamics in the countryside

Even though peasants fighting for land face many challenges, capitalist farmers see the dynamic unfolding in the countryside as dangerous to their interests.

On January 7, Venezuela’s cattle ranch-

A letter of this character is extremely rare, Richard Kohn, a military historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, told the *Washington Post*. “I don’t know of any precedent for something like this,” he said. “A retired group of military officers bands together to virtually oppose a Cabinet nominee? And a non-military one?”

During his confirmation hearing, Gonzales defended the view that the protections of the Geneva Conventions do not apply to alleged terrorists and that Washington should consider renegotiating the conventions, reported the *Post*.

Gonzales said he disagreed with portions

of an August 2002 Justice Department memo delineating under what conditions the use of torture might be permissible, but he did not quarrel with its general findings. He also said he did not recall many details about discussion leading to the memo.

Gonzales said that there had been only “some very preliminary discussion” about renegotiating the Geneva Conventions, but added that “it is appropriate to revisit” them. An August report by a panel appointed by the Department of Defense urged the creation of a legal category for detainees from “terrorist” groups who would not be covered by the Geneva Conventions.

Struggle for land intensifies in Venezuela

ers’ association, Fedenaga, condemned the new decree on land redistribution the government was about to announce. “This is not the right path,” said José Luis Betancourt, Fedenaga’s president, according to *MercoPress*. “If the purpose is to do away with property and institutions, it will mean the loss of peace.”

Salomon Centeno is a congressman with the opposition Democratic Action party, which alternated in the government with another capitalist party for decades before Chávez’s election. According to the Bloomberg news service, he complained bitterly that his 3,500-acre ranch “has been rendered useless,” by peasants occupying the land, “which gives the governor a convenient excuse to take my land.” This farm is among 16 currently under inspection by the Cojedes state government.

Such attitudes are prevalent among most big farmers, including those who have backed the government. “My father is the only cattle rancher in Barinas who agreed to turn his ranch into a cooperative,

where all the 20 workers now share in the profits,” Mariano Cadenas, a postal worker in Obispos, Barinas, told the *Militant* in an interview last year. “There are hundreds of cattle farmers in Barinas,” he said, “some of them with large capitalist holdings. Most of them support Chávez. But they hate the Law on Land and Agricultural Development. Especially the provision that says cattle ranches above a certain size are supposed to be turned into cooperatives. And they have refused adamantly to implement it.”

At the same time, many of the peasants who have won land titles, credit at low interest, and government assistance for new housing and other needs, have a hard time making a living. They are squeezed by the laws of the capitalist market. They get low prices for their produce while they often have to pay dearly for seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, and equipment.

“It’s an uphill battle,” Sarmiento said with a laugh. “But we are confident, even more so now, that time is on our side.”

LETTERS

Bolivarian Alternative

The joint trade and cooperation agreement signed by the presidents of Cuba, Fidel Castro Ruz, and Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frias, on Dec. 14, 2004—the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA)—could be described as a revolution on relations between nations.

Cuba is a socialist country where working people are in power. In Venezuela, a revolution is underway within a capitalist system, with tenuous changes so far but with possibilities for radicalization that would benefit the worst off social classes. The two countries have united in this project, initiating what in the future will become the norm for relations between the peoples of the Americas, who are so desperate because of the neoliberalism imposed by the United States and the plunder by the multinationals they have been victims of.

ALBA, which should bury the moribund Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, guarantees mutual development and equality of benefits and generalizes aid to other countries in such important areas as eliminating illiteracy and implementing a universal health-care plan.

The essence of this alternative is to guarantee the most beneficial and complementary production plan, allocation of resources, expansion of employment, access to markets, sustainable development, etc. in mutual solidarity that takes advantage of the productive potential of both countries.

Implementation of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas could become the motor force that would propel the development of our impoverished nations in the Americas and lead to improvements for the working classes that are so necessary.

José Martínez
Miami, Florida

Socialists visit coal mines

A coal team of socialist workers from Pittsburgh and Boston spent two days in West Virginia at the end of December.

Highlights of the team’s efforts were sales of the *Militant* at mine portals at mines organized by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), including the Pine Ridge mine in Prenter, owned by Peabody Coal; the Hobet mine near Danville, owned by Arch Coal; and the Rockspring mine owned by Foundation Coal in Wayne County.

At the Rockspring mine, workers, many in their 20s and 30s, voted for the UMWA over a year ago, but the election results are still being appealed before the National Labor Relations Board.

The team also visited UMWA pickets across from the Cannelton mine and processing plant, owned by Horizon Coal until the company went bankrupt last year

and closed the operation. Now coal giant Massey Energy, which has to date kept the union out of all of its mining operations, has bought the mine and plant and is bringing it back into production as a nonunion operation. The UMWA pickets are part of an effort to get the workers’ jobs back and keep their union.

The socialists sold a total of 34 copies of the *Militant* during the trip, which included a sale at a Wal-Mart in Logan.

Maggie Trowe
Boston, Massachusetts

Tsunami and Cuba

In the tsunami following the earthquake off Indonesia, over 30,000 people were killed in Sri Lanka 1 hour and 55 minutes after the quake. In Somalia, a full 7 hours and 30 minutes after the quake, at least 110 were killed.

In a socialist world, many of these people would have sur-

vived. As soon as the quake was registered, all attention would have been given to communication about the dangers in beach areas, using helicopters, if necessary, to inform and evacuate people, even in remote areas of the globe.

In the hurricanes last summer in the Caribbean and the eastern United States, hundreds were killed. The island of Cuba sustained the full force of the storms, yet suffered virtually no fatalities. In even unplanned natural disasters, only a socialist society can respond in the interests of humanity.

Allan Grady
West St. Paul, Minnesota

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of interest to working people. Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

Australian troops intervene in Solomons

BY BOB AIKEN

SYDNEY, Australia—One hundred heavily armed Australian troops were dispatched to the Solomon Islands capital Honiara December 23 within hours of the shooting of an Australian police officer on patrol in the city. In a show of force emphasizing Australian imperialism's long-term intervention in the small South Pacific country, the troops began patrolling the town the next day.

The Australian government has about 2,000 military personnel deployed around the world for military operations, including 1,100 in Iraq and the surrounding region.

The Australian rulers organized a regional intervention force of more than 2,000 troops and police to the Solomon Islands in July 2003 asserting the country was on the verge of becoming a "failed state." The troops have arrested 4,000 people since then, and seized 3,700 weapons. At the time of the shooting, there were still about 160 Australian military personnel in the country, as well as 150 police.

A Solomon Islander, John Ome, surrendered to police December 24 and has been charged with the killing. The slain cop was buried with full military honors in Canberra December 30.

Citing "mounting intelligence fears that rebels were regrouping and posing a renewed threat to the Solomons peace mission," the December 24 *Australian* said sending in the extra troops was "exactly the right message." Another intervention force patrol vehicle was fired on last October. In an earlier incident at the Central Prison in Honiara, prisoners threw rocks at Australian personnel and painted slogans against Canberra's military intervention.

Australia's foreign minister, Alexander Downer, said the troops would stay in the Solomon Islands for as long as they were needed "to demonstrate to anybody who thinks they can intimidate us that they won't be able to do that."

The goal of the intervention in the Solomon Islands is to re-establish "law and order," rebuild the "justice" and prison systems, and reorganize government finances to the satisfaction of the imperialist powers in Australia and New Zealand. It is part of stepped-up interference by Canberra in the affairs of the countries in the South Pacific that are dominated by Australian and New Zealand capitalism.

Last November, Downer threatened to cut off Australian aid to the Vanuatu government of Prime Minister Serge Vohor, claiming it had abandoned "good governance." On December 17, while in Vanuatu to sign an accord with the government of the new prime minister, Ham Lini, Downer declared the Australian government's relationship with Vanuatu "back on track." Radio Australia's Pacific correspondent Sean Dorney reported that Lini admitted the threat to cut aid had played a role in the ousting of Vohor days earlier.

Australian police began patrolling Papua New Guinea's capital, Port Moresby, early in December as Canberra moved to deepen its intervention in that country too. Seventy-five were on patrol in Port Moresby and 19 on the island of Bougainville as of December 31. The deployment is part of the "Enhanced Co-operation Programme" for Papua New Guinea an-



Australian troops land in Honiara, Solomon Islands, December 23, after the killing of an Australian cop there, to bolster Canberra's domination of the Pacific island.

nounced by Downer in December 2003 with the grudging agreement of Port Moresby. In addition to the cops, Canberra is sending more than 60 officials to take up positions as judges and top government administrators.

Reflecting ongoing tensions over Canberra's "enhanced co-operation," a report

released mid-December by an Australian government think-tank was condemned in Port Moresby. The report, "Strengthening Our Neighbour," asserted that without the intervention of the Australian government Papua New Guinea was in danger of disintegrating into "lawless ministates." In response, a statement issued by the of-

fice of Prime Minister Michael Somare accused the Australian government of taking advantage of "such outrageous claims to support their current policy of intervention into the Pacific."

Canberra has also been one of the firmest supporters of the Indonesian government's war against independence fighters in Aceh. The territory was placed under martial law in May 2003 as Jakarta moved to crush the fight for self-determination there, deepening a decades-long reign of terror by Indonesian military and police. A state of emergency, recently extended by newly elected Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, was in place in the heavily militarized region when the massive tsunami struck the province December 26.

Since then military operations have continued, with the Indonesian army claiming to have killed three rebels and detained five others January 1.

Following the devastating tsunami, Canberra dispatched 900 military personnel to Indonesia as well, deployed mainly in Aceh, northern Sumatra. The Australian Defense Force logistics, engineering, and medical teams sent there were dubbed "angels of mercy" in the news media here. It was an attempt to play on the sympathy for the victims of the catastrophe to paint the Australian military as a humanitarian force, rather than the instrument for defending the interests of Australian imperialism that it is.

Puerto Rico water workers end 3-month strike *Workers hold off gov't attempt to deal blows to their union*

BY LAURA GARZA

BOSTON—After 84 days on the picket lines, members of the Independent Authentic Union (UIA) of Puerto Rico ended their strike against the Puerto Rican Water and Sewer Authority (AAA). They returned to work December 27, after winning a new contract. The previous agreement had expired in 2003.

The strike, provoked by the management's decision to cancel payments into the union-run health-care fund and set up a privately run medical plan instead, was a major battle in which the government and AAA management attempted to deal major blows to the union.

In the end, the workers held off the attempt to substantially weaken the union, and to eliminate the union-run health-care fund and cut back a series of other funds administered by the union. At a press conference announcing the agreement, UIA president Héctor René Lugo said the major success of the union in the strike was "to have retained the gains and social benefits reached over the last 40 years."

As the strike unfolded, the AAA management leveled charges of sabotage against the striking workers. Press reports also claimed the strikers had little public support. FBI and IRS agents raided the union's offices and homes of union leaders, and 11 UIA leaders were later indicted on tax evasion charges.

Despite this onslaught and the claim by the AAA management that they had made a "final offer," workers stood firm. The union did not accede to demands by the bosses that they return to work accepting this offer, or to the pleas from Puerto Rico's governor that they end the strike without a contract and instead continue negotiations after getting back on the job.

The water authority's management responded to the refusal to return to work under the "final offer" by threatening on December 27 to begin permanently replacing striking workers. The UIA leadership and officers from a range of other unions responded that they would organize major work stoppages across the island if the bosses brought in scabs.

In that context, the governor appointed a "committee of dialogue" composed of other union leaders to negotiate an offer with rep-



AP/Andres Leighton

Water workers gather outside union headquarters Oct. 20, 2004, during FBI raid.

resentatives of Puerto Rico's government, including the current and former labor secretaries. Both the union and AAA accepted this proposal. The labor representatives on the committee that negotiated the contract that water workers finally accepted included leaders of the electrical workers union (UTIER), the Teamsters, and the Puerto Rican Workers Federation. The agreement expires January 2009. It includes \$1,800 in retroactive pay for each worker, and a raise beginning December 2004 of \$100 a month. AAA management was pushing to hold off any wage raise until December 2005.

Under the new contract, workers will have the choice of the privately run health plan of Triple S or the union-run medical plan. The UIA health fund will now be administered by a board with two union representatives, two management representatives, and a president who is neither from the union or the company. AAA will continue paying \$355 per month for each worker into the health plan. The agreement also includes maintaining under union control some \$200,000 a month in funds for legal assistance, disability pay, retirement pensions, and scholarships and loans for workers. The AAA management will be able to audit these funds. The number of union delegates allowed under the new pact is 100,

down from the previous 128. The bosses had sought a much bigger reduction.

The goals of Puerto Rico's rulers in the attempt to push back the workers were aptly described by John Marino, the managing editor of the *San Juan Star*. Marino stated in a recent column that AAA president Jorge Rodríguez "has rightly insisted on 'take-backs' of out-of-control benefits." He continued, "Outrageous union benefits and Byzantine restrictions on job classifications and worker scheduling are a big part of the reason why the water utility is such a mess." Another problem, he said, is the fact that "the government has also been unwilling to take unpopular but necessary moves such as charging for water the true cost of producing it."

In another development, after nearly two months of recounting votes, Puerto Rico's electoral commission certified December 28 Anibal Acevedo Vila as the winner in the election for governor of the island. Acevedo Vila, of the Popular Democratic Party, supports maintaining the commonwealth status of Puerto Rico, under which Washington has kept the Caribbean nation as a direct colony. His main opponent, Pedro Roselló, who served governor from 1993 to 2001, wanted to turn Puerto Rico into the 51st U.S. state.

Puerto Rico: Independence is a necessity

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